

SCREAM

#23

**THE
SHINING**

ISLAND OF
**LOST
SOULS**

MIL
MASCARAS
VS. THE
**AZTEC
MUMMY**

**JOE
DANTE**

**KEN
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SCREAM #23



NEWSSTAND COVER

DIAMOND LIMITED COVER

Artwork by Mark Maddox

Both the newsstand cover and limited edition cover of Scream #23 can be purchased online at www.screemag.com

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Love it or hate it, *The Shining* is a film that people have strong opinions about. It's a known fact that Stephen King disliked Stanley Kubrick's interpretation of his work—so much in fact, that King brought his 'True to the book' version of *The Shining* to ABC-TV as a three-part miniseries in 1997. Many fans will agree that there is no loser in this debate—we all win the horror trifecta. King's book is genius; Kubrick's film is truly "A Masterpiece of Modern Horror" as is stated on the film's theatrical poster, and, Stephen King's miniseries is a triumph that leaves no stone unturned as to how the author wanted to see his book played out on the (small) screen. Writer Bev Vincent (*The Road to the Dark Tower* and *The Stephen King Illustrated Companion*) makes his 2nd appearance in Scream to dissect all things Torrance and co. in his fascinating article "Overlooking The Overlook." The keys to rooms 217 and 237 await you.

Fans of lucha libre cinema have known for quite some time about writer Jeff Uhlmann's "two giants dead" production, *Mil Mascaras vs. The Aztec Mummy*, but the film was limited to festivals for a few years. We are excited to tell Scream readers that the movie has finally been issued on DVD, and it's a popcorn flick we can definitely recommend. If you enjoy Mexican wrestlers, robots and monsters (and really... who doesn't?), this fun flick is right up your alley. Scream's Bryan L. Yeatter interviews Mr. Uhlmann about his ambitious picture.

The news spread quickly that the folks at Criterion had licensed the rights to 1932's *Island of Lost Souls*. The moment I heard about the exciting development, I got in touch with writer extraordinaire Tom Weaver, who, as always, delivers an article that merits Rondo Award worthiness. Tom speaks with Criterion's Susan Aronson as well as prestigious film historian Greg Mark (who provides the commentary track for the film). Must read material indeed!

Our friends at Synapse Films keep the physical media flame burning. A recent roster that includes Blu-rays for Countess Dracula, Frankenhocker, Maniac Cop and Hands of the Ripper is wonderfully impressive. Add 1980's *The Exterminator* to that list as well. Writer Paul Talbot (*The Devil in Hollywood: The Films of Anton LaVerne*-Scream #19), returns with the definitive piece on *The Exterminator*. I'm certain that if you aren't aware of this grindhouse gem, you will want to see it after reading Paul's article.

I take great pride in introducing a few new writers to the pages of Scream. Anthony Taylor walks down 1313 Memory Lane with his piece on "Classic Monster Toys of the 1960s." Anthony's credits are too lengthy to be included here, but he was a monthly columnist for twelve years at *Toy Shop Magazine*, which constitutes instant credibility for us! Richard Jay Parker resides in the U.K. He provides the DVD review for MGM's burn-on-demand title *Burn, Witch, Burn* (aka *Night of the Eagle*). Richard's latest bestselling book, a serial killer thriller titled *Stop Me*, is an Amazon.com Top 10 best seller. To learn more about Mr. Parker's impressive accomplishments, visit his site at www.richardjaysparker.com.

It's Great to Have You Back Dept: Scream welcomes returning writer Kevin Sean Michaels, who had the pleasure of interviewing director Joe Dante at Comic-Con in July. Daniel Griffith chats with Scream about his upcoming independent documentary productions, and he takes time out of his very busy schedule to interview *Mystery Science Theater 3000* creator Joel Hodgson. Daniel and Joel discuss the MST3K favorite "Manos" *The Hands of Fate*, now available as a two-DVD set from the fine folks at Shout! Factory. King Karloff is the focus of two articles in Scream #23. Bryan L. Yeatter discusses Boris' final four films, while Scott Essman follows up his 80th Anniversary of Universal's *Dracula* piece (Scream #22) with a fine bookend on Karloff's 1931 classic, *Frankenstein*.

Greg Goodsell set down with Ken Russell for an engaging interview, and Joe Wawrzyniak continues with his third installment on "Playboy Playmates in Horror Films." Thanks to loyal Scream writers David Wilt, Michael Thomason, Shane Dallmann, Mike Sullivan, Aaron Graham, Brian Albright, and Todd Konrad. And lastly, I'd like to welcome artist Mark Maddox to the Scream fold. He supplies two covers for this issue! Bill Chancellor (as always) is in charge of all cover title illustrations, and my dear wife Karen is responsible for making this issue happen (and that's a whole lotta responsibility!).

Enjoy the issue!

Doyle
EDITOR

Thanks go out to Ron Adams, Kevin Clement, Donbald DVD, Mike & Lisa at Something Weird Video, Jeff Uhlmann, Mike Rans, Peter Dade, Synapse Films, Appreciative Films, Bear Manor Media, Roger Sapp, Paul's Hobby Zone, Richard Melley, Shout! Factory, Chris Rowe, Bruce Tucker, Mark Huxley, Steve Puchalski, Ron Kish, Ed Peters, Kevin Brown, Hollywood Video, Mike Lefebvre, Dave Cressler, Mike Pierce, Racer Designs, Monsters Unleashed, Eliot Brodsky, Shrek Naps, Ed Designs, Wetland Studios, Vince Ratale, Juan at 5th Dimension Films, Mike Krause, and Mike Yurka, et al!

OVERLOOKING THE OVERLOOK

ARTICLE BY BEV VINCENT

Stephen King's *The Shining*

The story behind Stephen King's inspiration for his third novel, *The Shining*, has been told many times. In brief, for a getaway weekend, he and his wife checked into the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado, not far from where they were living in a rented house in Boulder. Because the hotel was about to close for the winter, they had to pay cash—the credit card equipment had been packed away. The Kings had the dining room to themselves. The other chairs were upside down on the tables. The only thing on the menu they could order was Colorado beef. In one version of the story, King says the orchestra played "Moonlight Serenade" for them and them alone. In another, he says that the band had left days earlier and they ended to piped-in music.

King had been mulling over a Bradbury-esque story about a boy with special powers trapped in an amusement park, but he couldn't come up with a logical reason why the characters didn't simply flee the park to escape the terrors. The isolated hotel and the possibility of being snowbound solved this problem.

The Kings stayed in Room 217. Many of the novel's iconic images were drawn from things he encountered as he wandered the hotel. A bartender named Grady. The creepy clawfoot bathtub. The coiled firehoses, which figured in his dreams later that night. He spent the next four months at his leased office completing the novel, which he remembers as one of the easiest writing experiences of his career. It took him back to his years of poverty, struggling to support his family while trapped in a seemingly dead-end teaching job that was sapping the creative life from him. He channeled the rages he sometimes felt towards his children into the book, and wrote—perhaps subconsciously—about the power that alcohol held over him.

In *The Shining*, Jack Torrance, the new winter caretaker of the Overlook Hotel, is an alcoholic with rage issues, recently fired from his teaching job after hitting one of his students. He broke his son Danny's arm a while back and may have killed a boy while driving drunk. He wife, Wendy, has considered divorcing him. He thinks of himself as a writer—his story "Concerning the Black Holes" was published in *Esquire*—but after being fired he drank instead of writing. The job at the Overlook is his last chance to make something of himself. He plans to use his copious free time to write a play called "The Little School."

Jack becomes obsessed with documents he finds in the hotel's basement detailing the Overlook's past. It was the site of numerous violent acts over the years, turning it into a "huge storage battery charged with an evil powerful enough to corrupt all those who come into contact with it." Even without this malign influence, Jack might have cracked up from cabin fever. King describes him as a haunted house, with his abusive father playing the part of the ghost.

The hotel takes advantage of Jack's weaknesses to get at his son, Danny, to feed off the boy's supernatural powers. In the first draft, Jack kills his family, and Danny becomes the controlling force in the Overlook. King decided this was too terrible to consider, so he rewrote the ending. With the help of Dick Halloran, Wendy rescues Danny and the hotel is destroyed.

King structured the novel as a five-act Shakespearean play: Act I: Job Interview and Preparatory Matters; Act II: Closing Day; Act III: Wasp's Nest; Act IV: Snowbound; Act V: Matters of Life and Death. Feeling there were too many loose ends, he added an epilogue and, for balance, a prologue called *Before the Play* that detailed some of the hotel's past. The epilogue was trimmed and the prologue was removed completely by his publisher to reduce the book's cost and was later published in *Whispers* in 1982 and abridged for TV Guide when the miniseries aired.

The Shining became King's first hardcover bestseller, reaching #8 on the New York Times list. The manuscript circulated in Hollywood as a potential property for a film adaptation.

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*

At the time, Stanley Kubrick was looking for a novel to adapt. He wanted to tackle the horror genre in a way that would avoid direct comparisons with the supernatural films then being produced, such as *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*.

According to the legend, Kubrick's secretary would hear regular thumps from his office. After reading several pages of a book or manuscript, he would throw it against the wall. One morning, she realized the noise had stopped. Alarmed at the silence, she buzzed him on the intercom, but he didn't answer. She rushed into the office to find him reading *The Shining*, which had been sent to him by John Calley of Warner Bros. "This is the book," he announced.

Though King was contractually required to write a screenplay, Kubrick declined to read it. Instead, he chose to work with Diane Johnson, whose novel he had also been considering for adaptation. Johnson was giving a course on the gothic novel at UC Berkeley, so he thought she would bring a scholarly knowledge of literary horror to the script.

In an interview with biographer Michel Ciment, Kubrick claimed that he was interested in ESP and the paranormal, and believed that scientific experiments would ultimately prove their existence. However, he said, "The Shining didn't originate from any particular desire to do a film about this... I thought it was one of the most ingenious and exciting stories of the genre I had read. It seemed to strike an extraordinary balance between the psychological and the supernatural in such a way as to lead you to think that the supernatural would eventually be explained by the psychological. This allowed you to suspend your doubt of the supernatural until you were so thoroughly into the story that you could accept it almost without noticing... The novel is by no means a serious literary work, but the plot is for the most part extremely well worked out, and for a film that is often all that really matters... The problem was to extract the essential plot and to re-invent the sections of the story that were weak."

In a 2003 interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Diane Johnson called King's novel "kind of stupid, but it did catch you up and was totally engrossing despite its clumsiness."

Kubrick and Johnson eliminated the aging boiler that must be carefully tended to keep it from exploding, one of the novel's central metaphors. They also dropped the wasp's nest that Jack finds while repairing the roof. Their Jack doesn't become obsessed with the hotel's history. However, their script uses a lot of King's dialogue. For example, Jack's first conversation with Lloyd, the phantom bartender, and his later exchange with Grady during the party are almost straight from the novel.

Kubrick turns Jack into a self-indulgent artist. Jack wants to write, but he has no ideas and there's no evidence that he has any ability to tell a story, let alone string together a coherent sentence. He sleeps in until noon, has his wife cater to him hand and foot, and flies into a rage when anyone invades his writing space. He rips up a page in a hissy fit when Wendy interrupts him, as if the distraction has ruined what he's already written.

Kubrick's decision to change the topiary animals into a hedge maze is understandable. Thirty years ago, bringing these creatures to life would have been cost prohibitive and the end result would probably have looked fake. The maze works well as a metaphor for both the hotel and the workings of Jack's increasingly convoluted mind. Apparently King also considered using a maze in the novel, inspired by a topiary in Camden, Maine, where hedges were clipped into geometric figures, but decided not to because of the 1953 film *The Maze*.

The scenes in the hedge maze were made possible by Kubrick's decision to use a Steadicam, which does not require the use of a dolly, thereby allowing the cameraman to follow Danny and Jack as they plummet through its myriad passages, turning the audience into an active participant. Kubrick hired inventor Garrett Brown to operate the Steadicam, which had been first used two years earlier. Designed to disconnect the camera from the "bloke who's holding it," it is also responsible for the memorable shots of Danny exploring the hotel on his Big Wheel.

One change that many have seen as capricious is the renumbering of the room where Danny and Jack encounter one of the Overlook's ghostly residents. In the novel it was Room 217, but that was an actual room number at the Timberline Lodge in Mount Hood, Oregon, which was used for exterior shots of the hotel. The management reportedly asked Kubrick to change it because they were worried that guests might not want to stay in that room after seeing the film, so it became 237.

Kubrick added elements that aren't in the novel, though the movie's visual impact on those details in such a way that people are often convinced they were. The most obvious is Jack's manuscript, which consists of the line "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" repeated over and over in various layouts, with the occasional typo and flying cap. The results of Jack's sessions at the typewriter are never shown in the book.



In King's novel, Stuart Ullman tells Jack that Deibert Grady killed his wife and two daughters, but the girls never appear to Danny as they do in the film, nor does the elevator issue torrents of blood. Finally, Kubrick uses Danny's wagging finger to represent Tony instead of having him appear as a phantom version of his future self.

Kubrick's biggest struggle was with the book's supernatural elements. He couldn't believe that the hotel was inherently evil, so he converted the story into a domestic tragedy. His Overlook, as King writes in *Danse Macabre*, "becomes the microcosm where universal forces collide, and the inner weather mimics the outer . . . it was these elements, consciously or unconsciously, which Kubrick chose to accentuate." He thought a person might arrive at such a place with a death wish.

During preproduction, Kubrick called King to ask whether he believed in God. Kubrick said that ghost stories were inherently optimistic because they imply that something other than oblivion is waiting beyond the grave. He told King he didn't believe in heaven or hell, which is reflected in the way he downplays overt manifestations of the paranormal in his film. When Jack thinks he's talking to an apparition, there's always a mirror in his sightline. In other words, he may be talking to himself. Almost everything can be interpreted as a product of Jack's crumbling personality. Even Danny's persistent visions could be simply a defense mechanism against his father's erratic behavior, as one movie critic argued at the time.

Much of King's tension comes from Jack's disturbing scene, which creates suspense even during apparently banal scenes. According to his interview with *Cinefantastique*, Kubrick believed the audience would search for rational explanations before falling back on the supernatural. "I think *The Shining* uses a kind of psychological misdirection to forestall the realization that the supernatural events are actually happening." The first time something seemingly inexplicable occurs is when Grady releases Jack from the pantry. Kubrick grappled with the question of whether a hypothetical ghost could physically interact with the tangible. Assistant editor Gordon Stainforth said that Kubrick wanted to allow for the supernatural explanation but didn't want the audience to see how the door was opened. The sound of the bell sliding could have been in Jack's imagination and he might have somehow forced the door open off camera.

Kubrick proposed a different ending to King, one reminiscent of King's first draft. He suggested that Halloran might become possessed and kill the Torrances. At the end, they're seen in the hotel dining room. When Ullman leads a new caretaker's family on a tour, they walk past the table but don't see the Torrances, who become invisible—they're ghosts. King told Kubrick that audiences might feel cheated. Instead, Kubrick expended a lot of screen time getting Halloran back from Florida to Colorado only to have Jack bury an ax in his chest soon after he arrives. Though it's one of the film's most shocking moments, Halloran's return serves little purpose other than to provide the snowcat and Danny use to escape.

The hotel tells Jack that Danny has summoned Halloran, something he can't otherwise know. But does he really know? If Danny actually contacted Halloran, that would cross the line into the supernatural, but one could argue that a nagging suspicion of Jack drew Halloran back to the hotel. *NY Times* reviewer Janet Maslin wondered why Halloran "can smell trouble from Miami to Colorado, but he doesn't detect a killer standing 10 feet away from him, armed with an ax and wearing a horrible grin."

By the end of the movie, even Wendy is seeing things—the man in the dog suit in a compromising situation (an image extracted from "Before the Play"), the corpses in the cobweb-covered lobby, and the wall of blood, for example—but this may be due to shock created by her husband's homicidal behavior.



Nothing to see here . . . move along . . .

1979, a fire destroyed the soundstage containing the big lobby/Colorado lounge set, causing over \$2.5 million in damage. According to a June 1980 article in *American Film*, King spent a day on the set. He found Kubrick friendly but reserved. "He's a man you can go out and have a few beers with as long as you don't think you're going to go on and drink all night," King said.

The movie was released in the US in May 1980 and grossed \$40 million in its first few weeks but received generally negative reviews. A few days after it opened, Kubrick cut two minutes from the film. This section, near the end, contained a coda in which Ullman visits Wendy in the hospital to tell her that searchers were unable to locate Jack's body. Critic Roger Ebert says the scene calls into doubt Wendy's version of events. This scene has never been seen since, though some still photos from it can be found online.

Before releasing the movie in England, Kubrick responded to the reviews and what *Movie Comment* calls "erratic box-office" by editing out 25 minutes of footage. The cuts include some of the title cards, part of Jack's interview, Danny's visit to the doctor, some of the Torrances' tour of the hotel, parts of Danny's conversation with Halloran, the scene where Danny and Wendy watch *The Summer of '42* and another where Danny watches a Road Runner cartoon, some of Halloran's scenes as he returns to the Overlook, including his call to the garage to arrange for the snowcat, and the beginning of the scene where Wendy discovers Jack's manuscript. Because of Kubrick's hand in these changes, both versions are considered director's cuts.

These cuts couldn't address one of the film's major shortcomings, though: the utter lack of chemistry among the family members. Kubrick wanted his characters to seem like they came from Middle America, not the stock of horror films. However, it's hard to imagine Jack and Wendy as husband and wife. There is no tenderness between them, and little sense of the familiarity that should be present between two people who have been married for at least six years. There's also little interaction between father and son. Jack tells Danny that he loves him more than anything in the world, but there's no evidence of that beyond this statement and the atrocious he makes to Lloyd. "I'd do anything for the little son of a bitch."

A pervasive criticism of the film relates to its casting. In the novel, Jack starts out flawed but more or less normal and struggling to rehabilitate himself, whereas in the Kubrick film he seems crazy from day one thanks to Jack Nicholson's wild eyes, manic grin and reputation for playing insane characters. According to an interview in *Cinefantastique*, after watching the movie David Cronenberg told fellow director Mick Garris that he thought they had "cast the ending." In other words, he thought Kubrick had picked someone who would be credible as Jack when he becomes a shuffling, ax-wielding Quasimodo without considering how he might appear when he's supposedly normal.

Critics have also not been kind about Shelley Duvall's portrayal of Wendy. In the novel, Wendy is pretty, strong-willed and fiercely protective. In the movie she's a senseless ditz, bouncing about helplessly, completely subservient and needy. According to Jack, she's a ghost story and horror film addict, but that seems like a throwaway detail. She looks like she's wearing a lab coat, has a dissociated affect and doesn't even look convincing when she smokes. Her shrill voice reaches superhuman levels by the end of the film and she spends most of the time flinching, something Kubrick points out to Duvall in his daughter's behind-the-scenes documentary. To keep her in a constant state of agitation, Kubrick reportedly was mean to Duvall throughout production. In a way, he became her Jack Torrance.

After spending over two years in preproduction, Kubrick started filming on May 1, 1978 at EMI-Elstree Studios outside London, where *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Flash Gordon* were also shooting. Sections of the maze and a facade of the Timberline Lodge were built on the backlot for ground-level exteriors. The interior of the hotel was constructed on the soundstage, recreating real hotel rooms from across America. "How could I suddenly come up with a better room after all these years of architects designing them?" Kubrick asks in the behind-the-scenes documentary filmed by his daughter Vivian.

Though the shoot was only supposed to last 17 weeks, Kubrick didn't wrap until April 1979 and overshot his \$13 million budget by \$5 million. In February



Two deleted scenes from *The Shining*.
1) Wendy is in the hospital, following the horrifying events at the Overlook hotel.
2) At the nurses' station, Stuart Ullman (Barry Nelson) speaks with Danny (Danny Lloyd).

Much of the blame is leveled at the actors. However, it must be remembered that what ended up on the screen were Kubrick's choices from among many options. He famously did dozens of takes of most scenes, instructing his actors to portray every gradation of emotion from catatonic to hysterical. He believed that actors gave their most honest performances after they were numbed by repetition. Nicholson's scenes were often his 25th or 30th takes, by which point he was exhausted and goofy. That was what Kubrick elected to use in the film.

Kubrick's adaptation has been the subject of many, many scholarly articles and book chapters. Doctoral theses have been based on the fact that the hotel was built on an Indian burial ground and that some of its decor seems to be American Indian. A full analysis of its possible interpretations is beyond the scope of this essay. What does the nearly subliminal image of the bloody handprint on the woman's ass in the Gold Room mean? How can Jack be in the photograph at the end?

Kubrick's most ardent fans (and they are legion) have developed sophisticated interpretations of every detail in the film, including continuity errors. For example, some see the brief glimpse of the helicopter shadow during the opening credits as a metaphorical commentary on the nature of film. However, one of Kubrick's assistant directors believes that flaws in the masking process caused it. Some of his colleagues insist that, despite his reputation as a perfectionist, Kubrick simply wasn't all that concerned over details of strict continuity because these little "flaws" helped disorient viewers.

In a series of videos posted online, amateur filmmaker Rob Agar went through the film scene by scene to map out the Overlook and determined that the interior geography is impossible. As seen from the outside, the Timberline Lodge has large sections oriented at odd angles to each other, yet everything inside is at perfect right angles. Ullmann's office can't have the exterior window seen during Jack's interview because another scene implies a hallway in that direction. The bathroom window in the Torrance's apartment is perpendicular to the other windows, which means the apartment must be at a corner of the hotel. However, when Wendy lowers Danny from the bathroom, the window is nowhere near a corner.

The kitchen switches position relative to the lobby in different scenes, and the Gold Room is too large to fit into the hotel seen in exterior shots, Agar shows. He confirmed his results by examining the hotel's blueprints in the Kubrick archives. Many rooms—the game room, for example—don't link to the rest of the hotel at all. Agar speculates that Kubrick wanted the hotel to seem labyrinthine to disorient viewers and communicate the hotel's illogical nature.

The map of the maze outside its entrance does not correspond to its internal geography either. The model inside the hotel is an accurate depiction of the maze until the camera switches overhead, at which point the maze gains horizontal and vertical mirror symmetry. Kubrick aficionados and critics have come up with complex explanations for this fact.



King's reaction

Over the years, Stephen King has not kept his feelings about Kubrick's adaptation to himself. He called the film "cold and disappointingly loveless" and chiding. "He thought the director knew where all the scares should go and how they should pay off, but, finding this too easy, he decided to abandon the genre trappings for something of his own construction. For example, when Wendy discovers Jack's manuscript, horror movie fans know that she'll be caught. The only question is: when? Kubrick cuts away to show Jack sneaking up on her, thereby deflating the scene's building tension and wasting a potential scare. 'It's like a guy who doesn't know how to tell a joke,'" King said.

He told Doug Winter, author of *The Art of Darkness*, that the production was beautifully mounted and he appreciated the effects it created inside the mind, but he found a hollowness at the center of the story. It didn't make sense in either a literal or a metaphorical fashion, he believed. In *Dance Macabre*, he complimented the director's brilliance and vision, but called the film "maddening, perverse, and disappointing."

In a 1986 interview published in *American Film* magazine, King called the movie "a great big beautiful Cadillac with no motor inside. You can sit in it and you can enjoy the smell of the leather upholstery—the only thing you can't do is drive it anywhere. The real problem is that Kubrick set out to make a horror picture with no apparent understanding of the genre. Everything about it screams that from beginning to end, from plot decisions to the final scene." He later said, "I have my days when I think that I gave Kubrick a five-grade which he heroically threw his body on." Calling the film "beautiful and stylish, form over function, intellect over belief, style over content," King said it appeared to have been made "by a man who thinks too much and feels too little, and that's why, for all its virtuosic effects, it never gets you by the throat and hangs on the way real horror should."

Trivia question:

Who appears in both the film and the miniseries adaptation of *The Shining*?

The miniseries

Over the years, King expressed interest in remaking *The Shining* in a way that was closer to his novel. However, he was prevented from doing so because Kubrick retained the remake and sequel rights. After King's success with the miniseries *The Stand*, network executives at ABC asked him what he would like to do next. The timing seemed right to tackle *The Shining*. He told the network that he wanted to make the scariest miniseries ever broadcast on American television. He produced a six-hour screenplay that ABC accepted without changes.

Director Mick Garris told *Cinescape* that Kubrick was paid \$1.5 million for the remake rights. Kubrick attached other conditions. First, a DVD/video release of the miniseries in North America could not take place until two years after it premiered and only then after it had aired a second time. Kubrick also insisted that King stop saying bad things about his film.

King and Garris decided to return to the site that inspired the novel, the Stanley Hotel for exteriors and some interior shots. Designers, in cooperation with the Stanley's owner's interior decorating team, restored the neoclassical hotel's white lobby and ballroom to their original dark woods and patterned wallpapers, alterations that remained after production finished. Though shooting during the winter months, the filmmakers discovered that the hotel—and much of Estes Park—was located in a snow shadow: so \$100,000 was spent to ship in snow, ice trucks, and snowmaking machines. The same amount again was required to enhance the snow digitally in post-production.

Other shadows hung over the miniseries' those of Kubrick and Nicholson. Garris told *Conan* magazine, "There were specific visual and cinematic choices I made to go as far away as we could from how Kubrick chose to visualize the book. I didn't want to walk in [Kubrick's] shoes. What I wanted to do was visualize to the best of my ability what Steve had written." Gary Sinese, Tim Daly and other actors considered for the part of Jack Torrance expressed reluctance to take on Nicholson's famous role. Production was on the verge of shutting down four days before filming was supposed to commence when they finally cast Steven Weber.

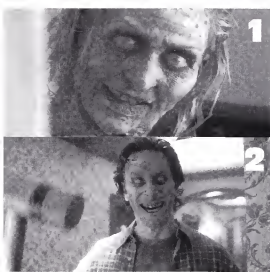
King had always wanted Rebecca De Mornay to appear in one of his films and she was their first and only choice for Wendy. In addition to her beauty, her strength of character shines through. Her Wendy is a strong woman, sensual, artistic, creative and determined. She stands up to Jack, and he listens to her—at first, at least. One of the clearest signs of how badly the Overlook has him in its grip is when he is oblivious to Wendy's attempts to seduce him.

The depiction of the Torrance family is one of the miniseries' greatest successes. Together with Courtland Mead as Danny, they form a tight unit. They clearly love each other. Jack and Wendy have a shared language of intimacy. Jack plays with his son and asks him what he wants to be when he grows up. He flirts with his wife and holds her hand. They get busy under the sheets from time to time. When things start to fall apart and they argue, it's a real tragedy because the audience has seen them in good times.

Production lasted for 72 days, with a budget of \$23 million, which included \$60,000 for each puppet used to animate the toymaker, though most of the live action shots were dropped from the final cut in favor of CGI, which cost \$20,000 per second. Time overruns—especially in Part 2—and requests from ABC's department of Standards and Practices led to the removal of 38 minutes of footage. Among the cuts was a scene featuring a life-sized version of the animated mantelpiece clock where Jack is lying across the chopping block and being hacked into pieces, and another in which the face of the phantom beam leader (named Gage Creed after the title boy in *Pel Semetary* and played in an extended cameo by King) melts and crumbles. Some of the deleted scenes are included on the DVD, with Garris explaining why they were chosen.

The miniseries debuted on Sunday, April 27, 1997, with parts two and three airing on Monday and Thursday of the same week, kicking off the TV sweeps season. It didn't fare well in the Nielsen ratings, running second and sometimes third to the other networks, and losing out to episodes of *ER* and *The X-Files*. Still, nearly 20 million people watched it on average each night and it finished in 12th place for the week. ABC was reportedly pleased with its performance among young viewers.

The miniseries restores several elements Kubrick eliminated, including the lousy boiler, the wisp's nest and Jack's obsession with the Overlook's history. There's also no question that supernatural things are transpiring. Jack and Wendy know that Danny has a special talent. They even rely on it from time to time. When the radio is broken, Wendy wonders if Danny might have been responsible because he used to lash out when he was unhappy as a baby. The Overlook looks different from the spacious hotel in Kubrick's film. It's darker and more ominous, with stuffed heads on its walls and chandeliers that rotate and sway. The hedgehogs are back, and used effectively for the most part. During their first assault on Jack, they move only when he isn't looking, which makes them ominous, like the stone angels in *Doctor Who*. Some of their menace dissipates when they are shown in motion.



Where are they now?

Lisa and Louise Burns were twelve when they played the Grady twins in the Kubrick film. Neither pursued acting careers. Lisa studied literature and language, and Louise studied microbiology. According to a 2002 sidebar in *Jane* magazine, they live in London, still have their dresses from the film and kept a jar of fake blood until it congealed. They reminisced about playing in the hedge maze, getting so lost that crewmembers had to remove panels to let them out.

Danny Lloyd, who was six when the film was shot, also decided not to pursue acting after playing young G. Gordon Liddy in a made-for-TV biopic in 1982. He became a science teacher and generally shuns any publicity associated with the movie.

What became of little Danny Torrance? King said, "I like the idea there is a world out there where Danny Torrance and Charlie McGee (Firestarter) could get married. They would have lovely wonderful children." He concedes that Danny's experiences at the Overlook would have left him with a lifetime's worth of emotional scars, though.

In late 2008, he mentioned a novel he hoped to write that catches up with Danny thirty-five years later. Danny is living in upstate New York and working as an orderly at a hospice. He uses his powers to help the terminally ill make the journey to the other side. Danny also has a sideline in betting on the horses, a trick he learned from his buddy Dick Halloran. King said. However, he admitted that, though the idea was great, he was having trouble getting down to writing it. "People shouldn't hold their breath," he told *Entertainment Weekly*. "I want to write it just for the title, *Dr. Sleep*... It will probably never happen."

As for the Overlook—the Stanley Hotel is still in operation in Estes Park. According to Rebecca Pittman's book, *The History and Haunting of the Stanley Hotel*, the spirits of its builder, F.O. Stanley, and his wife appear from time to time. The TV series *Ghost Hunters* has featured the hotel and observed what they consider paranormal occurrences. The Rocky Mountain Paranormal Research Society investigated the property and found a leak in the ceiling, but no ghosts.

Bev Vincent is a contributing editor with *Cemetery Dance* magazine and the author of *The Road to the Dark Tower* (nominated for a Bram Stoker Award) and *The Stephen King Illustrated Companion* (nominated for an Edgar Award and a Bram Stoker Award). He is the 2013 winner of the Al Blanchard Award and the author of over 60 short stories, including appearances in *Elery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Best New Zombie Tales* and *Evolve 2*. To learn more, visit bevvincent.com.



Answer to trivia question:

Denver journalist Bertha Lynn appears as a TV announcer in both versions of *The Shining*. Mick Garris reportedly didn't realize that she had been in the Kubrick adaptation.



A few scary sights from

Stephen King's The Shining miniseries:

- 1) Cynthia Garris as the woman in room 217
- 2) Steven Weber as Jack Torrance
- 3) One of the many creepy ghosts that lurk in the Overlook hotel.

THE AZTEC MUMMY RETURNS

Jeffrey Uhlmann on Mil Mascaras and the Resurrection of Lucha Libre Cinema By Bryan L. Yeatter

If there is any genre due a revival, one could easily make a case for it being lucha libre cinema. After its glory days in the 1960s and '70s, the genre slowed to a trickle by the mid-80s, and then a mere drip in the '90s. The DVD popularity of the vintage Santo and Blue Demon films demonstrates that the audience is still there, but new product has been slow to emerge. Santo and Blue Demon may be gone now, but one of their most noteworthy comrades in the war against the forces of evil is still around, and apparently still fighting fit. Mil Mascaras was the young upstart when he began appearing in films in the mid-1960s, but he is now the standard-bearer, and the most obvious choice to spearhead a cinematic revival.

Of all places from which such a revival could come, Missouri would probably have made no one's guess list, and yet it took an academic from the University of Missouri to bring forth *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy*. The brainchild of Jeffrey Uhlmann, an associate professor in the university's Department of Computer Science, the work captures the spirit, if not entirely the look, of the lucha films of old. In fairness to Uhlmann and his collaborators, recapturing the look would have been difficult under the best of circumstances, but let's face it, today's digital technology is hardly conducive to recreating the grit and grain we all love in those classic lucha films we grew up on. That will likely be an issue of minor import to fans starved for masked wrestlers fighting monsters, and while Santo and Blue Demon are no longer around to participate, their progeny, El Hijo del Santo and Blue Demon, Jr., do lend a

hand. Aside from the fact that Mil Mascaras is still dressing as flamboyantly as ever (yes, the leopard, tiger, and jaguar prints are still in his wardrobe, and he often looks like a torero on steroids gone Vegan), what will no doubt be particularly pleasing to genre fans about *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy* is its complete sincerity. In an era of witless and tiresome titles presuming to be prepackaged camp, Uhlmann and company have not sought to condescend to the genre, but have approached it with affection and a certain awareness of its absurd nature. Masked wrestlers fighting monsters: how could it be other than absurd? The outrageous nature of it all is what largely draws fans to the genre, and one can certainly find entertainment and amusement enough without a tactless approach or a presumptuous filmmaker turning on the high beams. Case in point: early in the story, as Mil Mascaras is sharing wine with his fiancée in a fancy restaurant, she shocks him by breaking off their engagement. "After you proposed to me, I began thinking," she explains, "and I realized I don't even know you." The poor, stunned wrestler asks, "Is it because you've never seen me without my mask?" The inherent humor really needs no trumpeting.

Another example would be the moment when one character explains to Mil Mascaras, "Those were Aztec magic mushrooms you were served. We can be sure the mummy was behind it." In both cases, the dialogue is delivered with a conviction that can only inspire admiration, and true fans have to appreciate such integrity. Had the performers been rolling their eyes or obviously playing for a laugh, there would have been zero payoff. It takes far more talent to play straight with something outrageous than it does to simply throw in the equivalent of a pratfall.

Jeff Uhlmann was very accommodating to an interview request, and seemed most eager to discuss not only *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy*, but also his ongoing work making movies at Mizmo.



SCREEN: How did *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy* come about?

JEFFREY UHLMANN: In the mid-1990s I was working at a government research lab in Washington, DC, doing work in various areas, including virtual reality. I had access to state-of-the-art hardware, and experience with that made me realize that technology could be used to dramatically reduce the costs and logistics of filmmaking. Filmmaking was an application that I really wanted to pursue, and an epic lucha film was about as exciting as anything else I could think of. In 1999 I told my colleagues that I was going to move to a university to create a program in "Entertainment Engineering," and in 2000 I took a professorship position in the College of Engineering at the University of Missouri.

The University of Missouri is one of the most academically innovative schools in the world, and its College of Engineering is especially adventurous in providing interesting and challenging applications for its students. I really can't imagine anywhere else that I could have pursued these kinds of projects.

How did you first meet Mil Mascaras?

I first met him in the lobby of a hotel during a conference. He was interested in a presentation I had made, and we talked for a while. Our paths crossed again later in Los Angeles when he invited me to meet his wife for breakfast. She's from Japan, so it was great talking with her about what she thought of seeing shows like *Ultraman* and *Giant Robot* on TV as a kid. It was also interesting over the years to see her two daughters grow up in a world where their father is shown on TV almost every weekend in films where he battles zombies and vampire women. Now that I think about it, it's also been interesting seeing my own kids grow up visiting film sets with Mil, Santo, and other colorful characters.

Do you remember the conference where you met him?

I don't remember the conference where I first met him, but I remember running into him a few years later at a SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques) conference in Los Angeles, which is the most important computer graphics and media technology research conference each year.

It gives the wonderful impression of him being the intellectual character we see in films.

Mil is extremely well read and knowledgeable on a wide range of topics. He travels all the time, and always has a selection of books to work through. His passion is history, but he's also interested in science and technology. In addition to books, he always checks for events at locations he visits, including conferences relating to his subjects of interest.



Just like old times: masked wrestlers show up to save the day (Blue Demon, Jr. leading the charge)



(left to right)
Argoza, Mil Mascaras, and Huracan Ramirez, Jr.



IDAKTOR on the loose!

Was he receptive to the idea of doing the movie?

Originally, I was reluctant to ask Mil to star in the film because the production plan I had worked out in 2002 would require almost seven weeks of his time, which seemed unreasonable to ask given his schedule. I knew Hijo del Santo's wife, Gabriela, and she said that Santo might be interested in blocking out time for the film, so I asked him about doing it. Unfortunately, the scheduling couldn't be worked out. I talked with Mil about it, and he said that if he were given enough lead time he could probably block out three weeks. He then offered to organize a separate two-week shoot in Mexico to complete the film. With that, we made plans for a 2003 shoot. That didn't work out, so we had to wait until 2004.

How was he to work with?

He was great to work with because he's very professional, always knows his lines, and he's game to do whatever needs to be done. What's interesting is the whole meta-experience of it all. For example, we meet with top people from the university at an expensive restaurant, we're talking about things, and here's the famous Mil Mascaras—in an expensive suit and mask—and it suddenly feels like something from a lucha film. At one point, a waiter delivered Mil's soup and Mil reached into a metal case, and in one quick move changed masks to one with an open mouth for dining. It all happened in mid-conversation, and he didn't skip a beat. It was amazing.

I imagine a masked man would draw a lot of attention out in public.

Well, we had a run-in with the police around midnight one night after filming. I had to drive Mil back to his hotel and we stopped for gas. After filling up, I pulled out and a police car hit its lights and pulled me over—the gas station was brightly lit, and I had forgotten to turn on my headlights when I pulled out. I rolled down my window, and the officer looks in and sees Mil in his mask in the passenger seat, and I could tell he was totally shocked and confused. I didn't know what to say, and there were a couple seconds of silence when Mil spoke up and said, "Hey officer, it's no problem. I'm a wrestler and he's a professor." That didn't really clarify things sufficiently, so I had to quickly explain.

Being approached by the police while in the company of a masked man is probably not an ideal situation.

It's amazing, but Mil has never gotten a traffic ticket, even though he logs several thousand driving miles a year. I remember his wife telling me how she's gotten tickets on a few occasions, but Mil never gets one when he's pulled over. She said that one time in Texas he got pulled over on the highway going well over the speed limit. She thought he was finally going to get his first ticket, but when she looked back, she saw the officer holding out a camera trying to get a picture of himself with Mil. Sure enough, Mil only got a warning.

There is a very old-school robot in the movie. Who came up with the design?

Back in 2003 I began trying to design and create a robot suit, but all I really came up with was the heavy glass dome and welder's mask for the head. The dome was made from a vacuum chamber. Anyway, I asked my brother to take a shot at it, and he did an amazing job. The only problem is that it's very top-heavy, and the dome is attached with screws and becomes airtight. In the first test, we realized that it was going to get very hot and oxygen levels might become an issue. The scariest thing, however, was that there was potential for very serious injury if it toppled over.

On the first day on the set with the robot, I got into the thing, and the plan was to have people with drills seal the dome on right before filming. I became very hot while waiting, but figured that wasn't going to be a real problem. Unfortunately, in the middle of a long take, I realized that I was starting to black out. I tried to yell "Oxygen!" but sound barely travels through that dome. The sound guy, Avery, saw that I was bent over and trying to say something; he listened and told the crew to get me out. It was a close call. It turned out that moisture from perspiration rises into the dome and displaces the oxygen. My brother and I never experienced that in our tests because nobody was in it for an extended period like that. From that point on we always had people there with drills to get me out as soon as I gave a signal with my arm.

Did you regret taking on the role, especially since you were already playing the part of the Mummy?

I actually played at least a half-dozen roles in the movie, largely because I was on set and could do it. For example, there's a scene when someone needed to hold a snake and threaten Mil; you can't see the handman's face, so I did it. I also did voices for the arena announcer, and other characters as needed. But there's no way I could have let anyone else risk getting in the robot costume.

How long was the shoot?

It was a total of seven weeks over three shoots. The first shoot was almost all interiors on campus, plus interiors at the state capital in Jefferson City. It began in mid-December and ended a few days before Christmas 2004. The second shoot similarly had interiors on campus, plus wrestling at the Missouri Theatre in Columbia, and exteriors at Capen Park in Columbia and the former state prison in Jefferson City. That was in April 2005.

The third shoot included interiors on campus, exteriors in Capen Park, the car stunt was an exterior in Columbia, the final battle between Mil and the Mummy was an interior at the prison and included connecting exterior shots with the luchador battle, and Mil's aircraft sequence was shot at the Jefferson City airport. The shot of him in DC with the Capitol in the background is actually the Missouri state capital in Jefferson City, as viewed from the airport. The third shoot was in April to May of 2006.

What was the budget?

My co-producer, K. Palaniappan (Pal), and I originally planned on a budget of \$80-\$85,000, but that amount was exceeded after the first week of shooting and skyrocketed from there. It was good that it was privately financed, because if the university had been providing the funding, the film would have almost certainly collapsed and never been completed. That fear of the worst-case scenario has impacted how we've managed the subsequent three films, which have been funded by the university.

Was there any sense of panic when you exceeded your projected budget after the first week?

Filmmaking can be a lot like dealing with a blackmailer. You think every extra payment will be the last, but they continue on. In some cases Pal and I knowingly incurred extra expenses based on what we thought the final cost of the film would be, but in other cases problems arose because we didn't keep on top of things as diligently as we should have. In the end, we spent what we needed to make the film we wanted without compromises.

How did Jeff Burr become involved, and why did he leave the project?

We originally hired a very experienced and well-respected DP, as well as a director who was not so experienced but was someone we felt could do the job. A few weeks before the scheduled start of production, however, the director informed us that she now had an agent who believed that the agreed upon pay was too low. After speaking with the agent, I realized that there was no way anything could be worked out. That left us in a difficult position because we couldn't change our production dates, so I had to desperately search for a replacement with only a few weeks to do so.

I was surprised to find a lot of great directors who were really excited about the project, and were eager to do it at our pay rate if we could postpone a bit, but that was impossible because of MI's schedule. At that point I called Scott Spiegel, who I knew had a lot of contacts, and he gave me the names of some directors who would likely be available on short notice.

One of those was Jeff Burr. I gave him a call, and he said that he could do it and could even bring along his own DP, AD, and line producer for only a little more than the amount we were offering him. That was great, because the DP was Tom Callaway, who really is one of the best in the business.

Jeff Burr arrived a few days before the scheduled start of filming, and he did a fine job during that two-week shoot. It turned out that the project was not really Jeff's tastes, however. He wanted to downplay the lucha elements and add comic relief characters and dialogue to make the film more accessible to a general audience. After the second shoot, I informed him that we were going to hire another director, and he said that he understood.

During the time between shoots, I planned to have Rene Cardona III, who is one of the great directing lineages in Mexico, finish the film and then immediately shoot a quickie (*Academy of Doom*) on its coasts the way they did with a lot of the old lucha films. We managed to make a schedule that worked for Tom Callaway when we learned that Rene wanted to use his own DP and crew. We were massively over budget from earlier shoots, so to make things work financially we decided to have a local crew, with Chip Gubera as director, work on the follow-on film and use only Rene's crew on the main film. That ran into scheduling and budgetary issues, so we just had Chip and the local crew do everything.

During the last round of filming, we shot the final battle scene, the big car stunt, and also had to re-shoot some scenes and parts of scenes necessary to make the film as it originally envisioned. That turned out to be enormously complicated, because we had to bring back actors and actresses—and find or recreate their original costumes—from a year-and-a-half earlier. In the final film, there are parts of scenes that were shot over a year apart that had to be seamlessly integrated.

When we told Jeff Burr that, in addition to not being involved in the remainder of filming, he also would not be involved in editing and post-production at all, he said that he wanted us to take his name off the film. We agreed, and that was the end of his involvement. It might sound contentious, but everything ended on friendly terms.

How did you come to choose Chip Gubera?

I arranged for a production class to be offered at the university, and asked Chip to teach it. I had worked with him on post-production for his first film, *Song of the Desert*, and knew he would be a great guy to work with students. I hired him as an instructor in our new information Technology degree program, and to teach the class and direct the follow-on MI *Mascaras film*, *Academy of Doom*. In doing the class and direct the follow-on MI *Mascaras film*, I realized that we could plan things so meticulously that Chip could walk from the set of one film to the other and complete the first film without disrupting his focus on the second. It sounds complicated, and Chip was very concerned about that, but I assured him that he would be able to work scene-at-a-time on the mummy film without having to worry about the big picture of how it was all going to come together. In the end, it all worked out.

I must confess to having been a bit skeptical prior to seeing *MI Mascaras*, as the *Aztec Mummy*. I was afraid it might be a parody, so it was a relief to find that you obviously had no intention of doing a send-up, but were instead making a sincere contribution to the genre.

The thing that fascinates me most about the genre is that it involves masked heroes who actually exist. The films take these real-life characters and place them in fantastic situations and show how they would respond. This film definitely shows MI's character in a lot of depth, and that's because of MI's active involvement in decisions relating to his role.

A good example is his costume when he first meets the President. He chose a very distinctive full-body jaguar costume with gloves. When I first saw it, I questioned whether it was the right choice for the scene, but he explained its significance as if he really were meeting the President that night.

I thought the casting of Richard Lynch as the President of the United States was very inspired. How did that come about?

We wanted someone with gravitas and sincerity. We had tentatively cast Marty Walker, who eventually assumed the role of the Commander of the Marines, but we also wanted a name actor, if possible.

Jeff Burr and his AD had connections to some people, and originally proposed Gary Bussey. Chip Gubera had used Reggie Bannister as the President in his first film, so that was an option. We also considered Dennis Weaver and Darren McGavin. Jeff Burr had worked with Richard Lynch on a film and proposed him as an option. That's who we went with, and it worked out great.

Was the movie distributed in Mexico?

It hasn't even played at a festival in Mexico yet because one of the prospective worldwide distributors wants a first-screening right for Mexico and Japan. However, many fans from Mexico have seen the film when it played in Texas, and gave it great reviews. A critic and aficionado of the lucha genre in Spain even said that it may be the best of the genre.

Lucha libre is still such a popular form of entertainment in Mexico. Has there been any indication that the movie might help jump-start a revival of the genre there?

I hope it's possible. The biggest obstacle is distribution. In the early 1990s almost all of the cinema chains were taken over by U.S. studios, so only the big American films are guaranteed wide theatrical distribution in Mexico. As a result, many younger people have lost an important bond to their cultural history. My fondest hope is that fans in Mexico will get a renewed respect for the lucha genre from seeing how much the films are appreciated around the world.

You said that you initially approached Hijo del Santo about the project. Any plans to work with him in the future?

Absolutely. I met with him and his wife in Mexico City a few weeks ago at a big event unveiling three postage stamps of MI *Mascaras*. I had hoped to talk with them more, but things were very hectic with the crowd and all the press.



A team-up between Mil Mascaras and Hijo del Santo would be great.

Absolutely. Mil, Santo, and I went out to dinner after we shot the tag-team match for the film, and it was clear that both would be open to the idea. Personally, I think it would be quite a challenge to come up with an appropriate script because they are such iconic characters, and after so many years a new film would have a lot of weight on its shoulders. I felt that a bit with the *Mummy* film as well, and I wouldn't take on a big Mil and Santo project without a bigger budget than we've had for the previous couple of films. Then again, a smaller, low-budget film might be better than nothing.

What is the status of your follow-up projects?

Academy of Doom was an interesting experiment because it had a bigger cast, lots of costumes, and more locations, and yet had to be shot in a fraction of the time with a fraction of the budget. It was inspired by some of the classic lucha films, like *Champions of Justice* and *Santo and Blue Demon vs. the Monsters*. My idea was that it's better to go with something ambitious and over-the-top with lower cinematic quality than to shoot something simple with higher quality. The quick-and-dirty approach had predictable effects on cinematography, but it also resulted in some scenes having to be deleted, and others re-arranged, with the net result being a story line that is a bit more obscure and psychedelic than originally intended.

We did post on *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy* and *Academy of Doom* simultaneously, and both were completed in 2007. We always expected the former to be a hit on the festival circuit, but we were surprised when the latter also proved to be very popular. In fact, we were rather shocked when *Academy of Doom* was selected for a couple festivals that rejected its higher-profile sibling.

Has *Academy of Doom* been released on DVD?

It was supposed to come out on DVD over two years ago, but it got hung up over the question of whether to go with a conventional distributor or release it independently. We decided to go with the latter last summer, but just didn't get it done. It will be out this summer.

Our third film, *Aztec Revenge*, had the lowest budget of all, but showcases Mil much more than *Academy of Doom*, where he was just one of an ensemble cast. The lessons learned from its predecessors came in useful when the production was hit with an unprecedented bout of continuous freezing rain that created havoc with the shooting schedule. We knew that if we didn't get the film completed during that window, we would likely never get it done, so we ended up having to literally grab the streets and put them into costumes as efforts were made to get everything shot when weather permitted.

Our latest film, *Vampyras*, doesn't have Mil in it. It's an ambitious attempt to tell a story based on actual people and events in the spirit of a lucha film. It stars Devonney Looser, who in real life is a distinguished professor of literature and also a roller derby dame. Right now I'm trying to arrange to shoot the most artistically interesting Mil Mascaras film yet, *The Mission*, which will hopefully be followed by a huge sequel to *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy*. I have no idea if they'll happen, but that's the plan right now.



"At least I wouldn't knife you in the back . . ."

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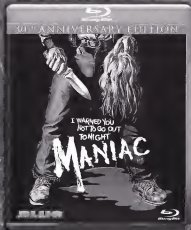
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A CONVERSATION WITH KEN RUSSELL

INTERVIEW BY GREG GOODSSELL

Ken Russell, the director of such masterpieces as *Women in Love* (1969), *The Devils* (1971), *The Boy Friend* (1971) and *Tommy* (1975) is sitting directly across from me. He's sharing a naughty story about Anthony Perkins, who he directed in *Crimes of Passion* (1984).

"Ah, yes. Very good, very good actor. I used to catch him on the set sniffing... going, 'sniff-sniff.'" Russell pantomimes putting three fingers to each nostril. "He was very good at sniffing. I asked him, 'What are you doing with all this sniffing?' He said, 'It gives you an instant high!' I said, 'How does it work?' He said it was very good for sex, grrrr. He said to take a couple sniffs of it, I went, 'Eh, what the hell,' and eventually I did a few sniffs and I keeled over head first and blacked out. I said, 'I see what you mean!'" Russell laughs.

Of all filmmakers, Ken Russell is the one who had the most lasting effect on this writer personally. I say this not lightly, as his films came to me at pivotal points in my development when I was finding out who I was and what this lively art of film was all about.

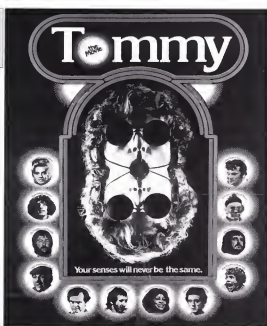
I first became aware of his oeuvre by his black-and-white biographies of notable composers and artists for the BBC that found their way to local public television. In particular, his biography on the dancer Isadora Duncan, *Isadora Duncan: The Biggest Dancer in the World* (1966), I found strangely compelling. A story about a most unconventional woman (played by Vivian Pickles, best known for playing Harold Cort's monstrous mother in *Harold and Maude*, 1971), Duncan revolutionized the art world with her radical new approach to dance. I was electrified by all the nudity and graphic violence playing on my father's black-and-white, 13-inch TV screen. Duncan's death, with her scarf being caught in the spokes of a roadster causing instant death by strangulation, was as potent as anything I had seen on *Chiller Theatre*.

Russell only has vague memories of that particular shoot. "I remember that. Nothing untoward. The scarf, I did that two or three times. I remember that it was easier to catch it in the wheels," Russell says, pantomiming the scarf as it caught around Pickles' throat.

Years later, as a troubled teenager, I would be enthralled by Russell's interpretation of The Who's rock opera *Tommy*. Catching it on the big screen in its original quintaphonic sound, I was fascinated by its images and music, something cinema is supposed to do but rarely does. I can seriously say that *Tommy* was the only positive experience I remember at the age of 15. I was instantly swept away by the visuals and its allegorical story about a deaf, dumb, and blind boy (played by Roger Daltrey) who rockets to fame as a pinball player. *Tommy*'s thundering score, wild impressionistic visuals, and simple allegorical story had a special resonance with me like no other. I wore out the soundtrack album and viewed the film over and over and over again.

Lisi Russell, the director's fourth wife (and a delightful hostess), and I both agree that *Tommy* is a testament that life is beautiful, that "it can be ugly and horrifying, but it remains beautiful."

The single image I most associate with Russell is the scene in *Tommy* when Ann-Margret hurls a champagne bottle at a television set to be showered with champagne and beans, dousing a boudoir swathed in luminescent white-on-white satin. The show-stopping sequence almost ended in disaster, as Ann-Margret injured her hand with shards of glass at the point of impact. Russell rushed to the scene, and carried the actress fireman-style to safety. Ever the trouper, Ann-Margret completed the segment.



Russell, at 83, (at the time of our chat) is heavily fatigued from his flight from New York to Los Angeles. He has some difficulty in recalling the genesis of that particular scene. "Yeah, it was greatly decided. It came out of nowhere. It all fell into place very simply. It all fell into place easily, although I don't remember the details. I don't have many recollections of it. I just know that it all fell into place very easily," Russell says.

While not remembering much of that scene, Russell regales me with yet another naughty celebrity story on *Tommy*'s set, involving The Who's drummer, Keith Moon, who played wicked Uncle Ernie. "It was a Sunday morning. We were sitting and it was a lovely day at the hotel we were staying at." There were some problems with the Russells' television set that was malfunctioning. "The hotel management called up to say, 'Oh we're sorry about the television! We'll send someone 'round.'" In response Keith Moon said, "Don't worry. I'll send it down—" Whereupon Moon chucked it out the window, Russell says, in his dry British manner. "And so he did!"

Ken Russell is a creative visionary who uses the movie screen as a canvas to paint wild, fantastic vistas in order to tell stories with a greater inherent truth and reality. Russell's *Lisztomania* (1975), once again starring The Who's Roger Daltrey (as Franz Liszt), features many show-stopping numbers. One of the most notorious images shows the German composer Richard Wagner as the Frankenstein monster, gunning down audience members amid a stage decorated with Nazi flags.

Lisi Russell explains that this scene was intended to show the roots of how German romanticism led to the twisted excesses of the Third Reich. When I ask Ken Russell if, in fact, poetry and art can drive people insane, he's somewhat noncommittal. "Good poetry can, I suppose. It's a good crazy!" he proffers.

I suggest to Russell that he may owe a certain artistic debt to American director Busby Berkeley, the master of staging and surrealistic song-and-dance numbers with a tentative connection to narrative. Berkeley was dismissed as camp in his native U.S.A. When asked if he thought Berkeley was a misunderstood genius, Russell says, "Yes, I do. As a child I was very much a fan. At the age of five, I was transported away, and it shows. He certainly was one of my top influences while I was a child."

Russell would pay homage to Berkeley in *The Boy Friend*, starring modeling sensation Twiggy (Leslie Hornby). Russell thought very highly of the sexies fashion fixture, who did all of her own singing and dancing in that film. "She was pretty. She would have had a career in films, definitely. I think she just got bored with the whole idea. You know, she could do anything!" Twiggy would act in other films and stage shows, but largely retreated from the limelight. Her last credit was as a judge on the reality TV show *America's Next Top Model* in 2003.

One American filmmaker that was never to Russell's liking was Stanley Kubrick, who many think aped Russell's style, in particular *A Clockwork Orange* (1972) and *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Russell's only real contact with him was when Kubrick picked his brain for locations for *Barry Lyndon*. "He rang me up, and he asked me, 'Where did you get all those wonderful locations?' I said there's a magazine with all those shots, that had all of those photographs, that had all the locations I used. I told Kubrick they were in that magazine, and anybody could go and pick them up.... I didn't care, the answer was so simple! I never cared for his work. I think he was very overrated. He was very derivative. I think he just picked up his ideas from wherever." Russell says that in spite of this, he is an admirer of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

The single actor most associated with Russell, Oliver Reed, was also a close personal friend of the director. Directing Reed in *The Devils*, *Tommy*, and *Women in Love*, Russell stayed in close contact with Reed up until his swan song role in *Gladiator* (2000), seemingly handing over the torch to another "bad boy British actor" Russell Crowe. While Reed had a reputation for drunken carousing and womanizing, Russell remembers him as being "as good as gold. He was fine. I had no problems with him whatsoever." Reed has a two-second cameo in *Maver* (1974) as a train conductor, "which we did just for fun."

The second actor most associated with Russell was the acerbically wonderful Glenda Jackson, who performed in Russell's *Women in Love* and *Salome's Last Dance* (1988). Russell has very distinct memories on how Jackson would prepare for a scene. "She had this big, broad scene. I popped in during lunch time to see if there was anything I could help her with. I asked her, 'Are you alright this afternoon, Glenda?' She says, 'What are we doing this afternoon?' I was taken aback. I said, 'It's the most difficult scene in my entire career, a lot of dialogue.' She goes, 'Oh, that! Oh, that's no problem.' She was smoking a cigarette and reading a magazine the entire time, very cool," Russell laughs.



VANESSA REDGRAVE~OLIVER REED IN KEN RUSSELL'S FILM OF THE DEVILS

A Robert H. Solo-Ken Russell production in company to Ken Russell
Based on the play by John Wiering and "The Devils of Loudon" by Milton Rhoda. Directed by Ken Russell
Presented by National Screen Service
Financed by Warner Bros. A Kinney Leisure Service

performance in the title role of the biblical temptress is one of the most astonishing singular performances in film. As is common knowledge by now, Milais-Scott "was pretty well blind. She was very easy to direct. She was limited in her means of expression, as they were. It didn't faze her, the blindness." Only appearing in a handful of TV roles prior to *Salome*, Milais-Scott stopped acting immediately afterwards. "She disappeared. She was very good. I liked her very simple delivery—'Bring me the head of John the Baptist!' A great line."

One film from this period that Russell has mixed feelings for is *Where*, also known as *If You're Afraid to Say It... Just See It* in 1991. *Where* told an unapologetically gritty tale about a Hollywood hooker played by Theresa Russell, that didn't sit well in the era of fun and bouncy prostitutes as played by Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* (1990). Russell says that it was a good shoot, "but Russell didn't want to do it. I called her in Switzerland and talked her into doing it. She eventually did it. First of all, she was all for it, and then, her boyfriend disapproved of it." Despite the on-set turbulence, Russell admits that "she was very good in the role."

Later that evening, thanks to fellow Screen scribe Shade Rupe, the Russells are feted at a lavish dinner party hosted by TV's *Masters of Horror*. At the "in-crowd" restaurant, Hamburger Hamlet in Hollywood, the Russells are wine and dined to a packed room full of genre directors. I spot Larry Cohen (Screen #12) who gives me a warm hug and thank you for the cover article on his *It's Alive* (1972). So many notable filmmakers are there, the head spins. Just a short list includes Katt Shee, Mary Lampert, Armand Mastroianni, Mick Garris, Adam Rifkin, Richard Franklin, Tom Holland, and Stuart Gordon, among many others. I ingratiate myself to the audience by naming their credits, to which some are duly impressed. "Brian Trenchard-Smith! *Dead-End Drive In* (1986) and *Escape 2000* (1982)!"

To my lasting chagrin, my mind becomes blank with more mainstream filmmakers in attendance. Imagine the lasting embarrassment when I draw blank the names and personages of Peter Medak, the director of *The Ruling Class* (1972), one of the greatest movies ever made and Si Lutwinoff, the executive producer of *A Clockwork Orange*, arguably the greatest movie ever made!

Most tellingly, I spy director Nicolas Winding Refn, the latest British bad boy film director, standing off in a corner. Refn's *Bronson* (2008), about Great Britain's most notorious violent criminal, can be interpreted as a lavish recreation of Russell's expressionistic style. I gently confront the shy and retiring Refn about this, and he guiltily admits that yes, "Bronson is very much indeed a homage to Russell, along with Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954)!"

The day I spent with the Russells was a highly memorable one. It was somehow oddly fitting to finally meet the man who turned my head around to the idea of art in cinema, leading me to watch, study, and, yes, write about films. Every word that I have written about movies is somehow indirectly related to the films of Ken Russell, and I thank him for it. To paraphrase his lovely wife Lise, Russell taught me more than anyone that cinema is beautiful, and that it can be ugly and horrifying—but it remains beautiful.

Russell had previously remarked that Jackson could be plain and then the most radiant creature in the universe. "I had a crush on her, I guess!" Jackson would eventually leave acting for politics, winning a seat in the British Parliament in 1992.

Russell, while still active today, built a new generation of fans in the U.S. in the late eighties with a series of films that were released direct to video, called his "Vestron Period." Russell has very fond memories of directing the incredible Amanda Donohoe in *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988), an iconic bad girl performance in his adaptation of a Bram Stoker tale. "Oh yes, she was excellent! She would do anything! She did everything that was required of her."

While famous for his work with such warhorses of the stage and screen, Russell is also known for leading a young unknown, Imogen Milais-Scott, in his adaptation of the Oscar Wilde play *Salome's Last Dance* (1988). Milais-Scott's



A Coda Not Fit for a King: Boris Karloff's Final Films

By Bryan L. Yeatter

For years now there have been those who have lamented the fact that *Targets*, Peter Bogdanovich's excellent 1967 directorial debut, was not Boris Karloff's final film. There is nothing but respect in this sentiment, of course—a desire for the great, beloved thespian to end his run on a high note—but diaphanous fans can digress in good conscience. *Targets* certainly would have been a fitting coda to Karloff's filmography, for not only was it an excellent work, but also a role that seemed to summarize his career. In it, he played an aging horror film star grappling with retirement, feelings of irrelevance as an old school bogeyman in an increasingly horrific modern world, and, ultimately, his own mortality. Excepting the retirement, the role was Karloff (he would never consider hanging it up, often expressing his desire to "die in harness"). Even the character's name—Byron Orlok—was a knowing wink.

Yes, it might have been an apropos send-off for the game's all-time King, but that just wasn't what Karloff had in mind. There is no mystery as to why he kept working: he did it because it gave him a sense of purpose. "Actors don't retire," Bogdanovich said to Karloff in *Targets*, and for the most part that's true. Karloff certainly didn't, he once conveyed his feelings on the subject when he told an interviewer that he didn't feel truly alive without having another role lined up to tackle. Acting is what he did, and he saw no reason to stop. We should all be so lucky to still be doing what we love at such an advanced stage of life, to say nothing of being so well paid to do it and still be in such demand.

In February of 1968, Karloff traveled back home to England to headline *The Crimson Cut*, and became ill during a frigid evening shoot outdoors. The press first reported his admission to a London hospital as simply being a matter of a routine checkup, but a few days later reported that the actor had been hospitalized for a week with bronchitis. The truth is that Karloff had caught pneumonia during that night shoot, and that it left his lungs decimated. It certainly would have been easy—advisable, really—for him to retire at that point, but still he soldiered on. Then came the offer from Luis Enrique Vergara.

Karloff was contracted by Vergara to appear in four features—*Snake People*, *Fear Chamber*, *The Incredible Invasion*, and *Mesdames S'enfouissent Vergara* had been the producer of some of the more memorable lucha libre and Mexican horror films of the 1950s, including *The Diabolical Hatchet* (1955), *The Grave Robbers* (1955), *The Witches Attack* (1955), *Blue Demon vs. the Satanic Power* (1956), and *The Empire of Devils* (1956). He would also bring John Carmichael to Mexico to star in *The Diabolical Pact*, *Mesdames Devils*, and the *Mil* Mascara films *Las Vampiras* and *Engendra de Muerte* (all in 1968). Landing Karloff for a multi-picture deal was a whole other level of achievement, however, and one that didn't come cheap. Karloff's four-film salary was said to be \$400,000, a very considerable sum in 1968, but shortly after Karloff's death Vergara was quoted as saying the actor had never collected his fee. Instead, Karloff had instructed Vergara to have the money deposited in an account in Mexico that the actor could draw from during a future vacation that he planned on taking there in—get this—1972. Well, perhaps Karloff was not too concerned with his own mortality—he certainly seemed to have been planning to be around a good while longer.

The \$400,000 fee was only part of the expense involved in hiring Karloff. Due to the respiratory problems caused by the pneumonia, doctors advised against him making the trip to Mexico, cautioning him that the altitude would do no favor to what was left of his lungs. All of Karloff's scenes would therefore be shot at the Dorel Studios facility on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles. This created another set of issues for the production team, as it necessitated Karloff's scenes for each film to be shot successively over a five-week period, with the production team then returning to Mexico to finish the films one at a time by shooting around the Karloff footage. Extending this methodology across four films did not bode well for the continuity of any of them, but unless the films were to be shot entirely in Hollywood, there seemed to be no other option. Production costs were being ratcheted up considerably by the need to shoot even part of the films in Los Angeles, and it was already a disproportionately high expense for a Mexican production to have to shoot out for renting a Hollywood soundstage, to say nothing of paying transportation and lodging for cast and crew to make the trip. Imagine complicating things even further with unions. The cost of it all would be borne in part by Columbia Pictures, which entered into a co-production deal with Vergara's *Filmica Azteca*, but ultimately that may have created as big an expense as it helped defray since it meant the involvement of various workers' guilds, all requiring a comparable unionized technician be hired for each Mexican crewmember on hand. It must have driven Vergara to despair. Even the direction of the Hollywood footage was taken from the able hands of Juan Ibanez and given to Jack Hill. Of course, Hill was very capable himself (as was Austin McKinney, the cinematographer of the Hollywood footage), but with the films bound to have continuity problems brought on by the patchwork nature of their construction, mixing and matching directors wasn't likely to help matters.

Hill had been brought in to rewrite three of the films after Karloff had rejected Vergara's original screenplays. The fourth—*The Incredible Invasion*—was rewritten by Karl Schanzer, who, like Hill, was a protégé of Roger Corman. Hill had previously written the Karloff film *The Terror* in 1963, a quickie produced by Corman merely to capitalize on the fact that, contractually, Karloff was still beholden to Corman for a few days after production wrapped on *The Raven*. Using the elaborate standing sets from that film, *The Terror* looked good, and was passably entertaining, though in retrospect it is really noteworthy mostly for the number of young filmmakers involved who went on to bigger things. It certainly in no way deserves the criticism that it was an incomprehensible work, a bizarre assessment that has been made by some. That would be a fairer critique of a couple of the Vergara films.

Considering the hard road they traveled, it's a wonder the Karloff/Vergara films came out at all. Columbia divested its interests in the project at some point, and further complicating things and threatening to keep the films in limbo was Vergara's own death not long after Karloff's passing, all of which goes a long way toward explaining the mess that at least two of the films wound up being. If the end results represent the rewrites Karloff accepted, one shudders to think what Vergara's screenplays were like in their original form. Hill would later claim the films that eventually came out showed little trace of the rewrites he had done, which is not difficult to believe. There is no telling how much things had been shifted and rearranged between April of 1968 when Hill shot the Hollywood footage and 1971 when the films finally began to surface. Reinforcing Hill's claim is the fact that during the climactic scene of *Snake People* Karloff appears to be playing to a different scenario than what the audience is seeing; his dialogue just doesn't altogether jive with the moment (hence the inclusion of the horrible overdubbed dialogue by another actor).

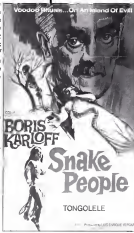
Of the four films, *Snake People* fares best. The other three films suffer more demonstrably from their piecemeal construction, and show obvious signs of tremendous production problems. *Snake People*—also known as *Isle of the Snake People* and *La Muerte Viviente* (*The Living Dead*)—has a narrative cohesion largely lacking in the other films, though it too falters on occasion, most notably in several instances where the dubbing only serves to confuse things. It isn't easy to discern how necessary it might have been to dub additional dialogue for Karloff's character (some of it seems fairly superfluous), but with Karloff by then deceased, another actor was brought in to read the lines. It would have helped to have someone who could at least attempt to simulate Karloff's voice (no small task, as evidenced by the 1953 Italian film *Monster of the Island*), but this was evidently considered to be of little consequence—the results are risible.

The story concerns a French officer, Captain LaBiche (Rafael Bertrand), who travels to the Pacific island of Korbat, a French colony where he has been dispatched to restore law, order, and apparently decency as well. He is appalled to find the local authorities lacking discipline, loafing, carousing, and drunk, the latter being especially embarrassing since LaBiche has arrived on the island with a temperance worker, Annabella Vandenburg (Julissa), who is on a crusade to "make a better world" by "destroying the demon—drink." Toward that end, she plans to enlist the aid of her uncle, Karl Van Molder (Karloff), a wealthy plantation owner on the island.

Lieutenant Wilhelm (Carlos East), the commanding French officer prior to LaBiche's arrival, takes both Annabella and LaBiche to Van Molder's plantation, and along the way they come across a funeral procession. It is a very promising moment, excellently conveying both mystery and menace, while also exhibiting some dry humor. Wilhelm explains the ceremony to Annabella and LaBiche, telling them how the body will be buried in a special place and a three-day vigil kept over the grave, "just to be sure."

"To be sure of what?" asks Annabella. "Oh, to be sure that the bodies cannot be raised and made to walk at night, forced to work in the fields," Wilhelm explains. "Which I gather doesn't happen too often," Annabella says with a hint of nervousness. Wilhelm shrugs. "Not too often," he remarks casually.

Annabella is further unnerved by the icy stare of one of the natives in the procession. Noticing the anxiety on Annabella's face, LaBiche asks, "What's the matter, Mademoiselle? Did he frighten you?" The moment's sense of unease is superbly accentuated by the musique concrète. "Captain," Wilhelm interjects, "sometimes even I get frightened by these people's eyes."



Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the brief passage is then squandered by a horrendous dub-job, in which a voice intended to be Wilhelm's begins to expound on his observations of the natives' eyes as the scene switches abruptly to a ritualistic voodoo dance (presumably a part of Wilhelm's narrative being played out). The voice is not only different from what has already been established as Wilhelm's, but is far too animated to match the subdued tone exhibited by the character. Both the funeral procession and the ritualistic voodoo dance stand well on their own. Prompting one to arbitrarily switch to the other is very disruptive; adding a voice-over that contradicts the character it purports to be is just too great a burden.

Once returned to the story proper, we join the trio upon their arrival at Van Molder's plantation. Van Molder is on obvious friendly terms with Wilhelm, and is delighted to greet his niece, whom he has not seen since she was a child. But he is suspicious of LaBiche's arrival, and openly questions his purpose in coming to the island. Van Molder wonders if LaBiche's presence might do more harm than good, and is perturbed by the Captain's objective of depositing local customs in favor of French ideals (a common sticking point with any form of colonialism).

As the story progresses, LaBiche becomes enraged by talk among the natives of a mysterious figure named Damballah, who heads up the local voodoo cult. He is frustrated further by his inability to discover the identity of this cult leader, and to stop the secret ceremonies from taking place. As a result, LaBiche's interrogations become more extreme, which infuriates Wilhelm, who cautions against arousing the locals. The warning comes too late, however, and cannibal women are turned loose on the local authorities, prompting LaBiche to instigate a curfew over the island. But this does nothing to alleviate the trouble, and LaBiche's men are compelled to desert. Left with only Wilhelm to help him, LaBiche receives an unexpected visit from Van Molder's overseer, Kinslor (Quintin Baines), who reveals the time and place of the next ceremony. As it turns out, Van Molder is Damballah (no surprise), and Kinslor has been reprimanded for reviving a dead native girl for his own pleasure. The girl had been sacrificed as a bride to the cult's supreme pagan deity, and Kinslor is therefore beaten by Van Molder while the girl is reduced to a smoldering, rotting corpse by Kalea (Tongolele). Van Molder's servant and trusted sidekick within the cult, Kinslor then reveals the cult's plans to LaBiche in a fit of pique, and after LaBiche straps an arsenal of dynamite to his torso he and Wilhelm head off to the ceremony, where they find that Van Molder plans to sacrifice Annabella to the cult's pagan god (presumably because she is chaste). LaBiche confronts Van Molder at the climax, which plays out fairly predictably.

The film employs a good deal of gusto in tackling its perverse motifs, necrophilia in particular. In the opening pre-credit sequence, Kinslor (with the aid of dwarf Santanon) digs up the native girl he seeks to restore from the dead to satiate his lust ("Imagine," he remarks later, "a beautiful woman who can't talk—every man's dream.") Even the process of unearthing the coffin becomes something akin to a frenzied sex act, each thrust of the shovel seemingly bringing both men to the brink of orgasm. After a rite is successful in awakening the dead girl, Kinslor crawls into the coffin with the animated corpse for their first sexual dalliance, as Santanon embraces the chicken decapitated in the ceremony, clinging to it with a tormented longing. The film later reaches its zenith in a surreal dream sequence wherein Annabella is seduced by her own far less inhibited Doppelgänger.

Interesting on another level would be how the film addresses the problems that are a natural consequence of colonialism. As Van Molder, Karloff expresses it well; when LaBiche announces his intention to bring law and order to the island, Van Molder's low threshold of tolerance is very discernible. "Who's law?" he retorts. "The people of Korbai have had their own law for centuries." He goes on to warn LaBiche of the possibility of incurring serious consequences by imposing laws that would be contrary to the longstanding traditions of the islanders.

Other than its occasional dubbing gaffes and continuity flubs, the most disappointing aspect of *Snake People* is how staid the Hollywood footage is. Anyone familiar with *Spider Baby* (1964) knows how capable a director Jack Hill was (is?), yet the footage he shot for the Vergara films doesn't come across as particularly inspired, relying largely on ordinary medium shots. As the footage mostly involved Karloff, there is the fact of the aged actor's extreme lack of mobility to consider, but more close-ups here and there would have done much to catch the viewer's eye and break up the monotony of the presentation. As it is, the perfunctory nature of Hill's footage simply invites the viewer to share in the director's seeming disinterest.

Ibanez's footage, on the other hand, moves fluidly—sometimes frantically—verfuring in close, then closer, shooting from varied angles, unwilling to stay fixed in place, eying from on high, eying from down low, becoming way too personal with Tongolele while she's grinding and jiggling during the ceremonial dances—at least with *Snake People*. Ibanez was on his game. Hill may have been privileged in shooting the Karloff footage, but Ibanez definitely had the advantage, as the film's choicest perversities fell on his plate. Most of the ceremonial madness came on Ibanez's watch, including one ritual in which Santanon savagely whips a young woman, and enjoys every lash. Santanon later plays what has to qualify among the harshest death scenes in cinematic history. Whether or not that counts as a plus or minus is a matter of personal taste.



Karloff with Rafael Bertrand in *Snake People*.

The shame of it all is that, had the film been more competently managed and edited, it would have been a much more creditable piece of work. The components were there for an effectively chilling work—voodoo, an isolated location, protagonists both tentatively cumbered and unfamiliar with their environment, and to top it off, the King of Horror presiding over it all. Unfortunately, the presentation gives the impression of having been stitched together by incompetents. Nonetheless, as it is, and for all its flaws, it still manages to achieve a degree of success against the odds, which is more than can be said of two of its companion features.

Between *Fear Chamber* and *The Incredible Invasion*, it would be a toss-up as to which could take its place as the worst film of Karloff's career. *Fear Chamber* is a convoluted mess of a film that casts Karloff as a scientist engaged in a lifelong undertaking in which he seeks to gain information on the origins of man and the universe from a living rock found in the crevice of a volcano. Feel free to go back and review that sentence again, just to be assured you read it right.

Karloff portrays Dr. Mantell, who is assisted in his work by his daughter Corinne (Julissa) and her fiancé Mark (Carlos East), both of whom appear to have scientific training; he is also helped by a psychologist named Helga (Isela Vega) and a fairly dim-witted brute named Roland (Yenye Beiruti), who is something of an orderly. As the film opens, Corinne and Mark are in a cavern of the volcano keeping Mantell apprised of their findings via telephone(s). They come across the rock, bring it back to the laboratory, and before you know it, the whole group is busy kidnapping young women and scattering them half to death in some dungeon torture chamber with a paradoxical mix of blasphemous Satanism and inquisition-style ramblings. It is quickly revealed that there is a perfectly scientific reason for such theatrics: having established communication with the rock via computer, the scientists have learned (or, more properly, they have been told by the rock) that the strange creature thrives on some heretofore unheard-of substance found only in the blood of women experiencing extreme fear (just where the rock would have had access to this substance beneath the earth's surface is never made clear). In order to carry out their experiments, the group has to supply the rock with this nourishment, otherwise it will refuse to divulge any of the information they suspect it of having. With dwarf Santanon and a sinister man in a turban to help round out the unlikely entourage, they set up a women's employment agency as a front whereby they can lure women, drug them, take them into the titular chamber (a highly elaborate secret room in Mantell's house, filled with cobwebs, skeletons, snakes, spiders, and boiling cauldrons), scare them into a stupor, and then extract the vital fluid. When the women awake the following day, they are told that the whole thing was merely a nightmare.

One of the young women taken in by the group of scientists turns out to be a thief who wanders about the house at night and runs about of the rock, which has by then received enough nourishment to enable it to grow a sort of tentacle/feeding tube. When the woman's dead body is discovered, Mantell, Corinne, and Mark all agree that the experiment has gone too far and that the rock must be destroyed; Helga is against the idea, but is outnumbered.

The shock of finding the dead body hits Mantell hard, and he takes ill; thereafter, he is basically confined to bed for the rest of the film. He and Helga convince Corinne and Mark to get away from it all with a long overdue vacation, which leaves Helga in charge of things. With Corinne and Mark out of the way, and Mantell convalescing, Helga and Roland take advantage of the opportunity to keep the experiment going, and soon enough they are completely out of control, abducting strippers for the rock to feed on. Roland becomes convinced that the rock will help make him "king of the world," a curious reaction to the rock's supplying him with a bogus formula to create demons. All of this dements gives Roland a very independent attitude, and he strangles Helga when she second-guesses their decision to keep finding victims for the rock. Corinne and Mark return in time to help Mantell destroy the creature, with Mantell managing to crawl out of bed long enough to get to the lab and reverse the computer program, thereby changing the creature back into a small, harmless rock. Roland is last seen wandering down into the cavern where the rock was discovered, and ranting and raving about being king of the world. If all of this sounds fatuous... it is.

Far more than it was in *Snake People*, the Hollywood footage in *Fear Chamber* is uninspired, and at times embarrassingly amateurish. There are some scenes in which Karloff's dialogue is shot from across the room without once bothering to change distance or angles. The crew may as well not have been there, as they seem to have merely set the camera up, turned it on, and had Karloff deliver his lines. Who needs a director? Otherwise, even allowing for the idiotic storyline, the narrative is irredeemably disjointed.

The *Incredible Invasion* may have it best. A jumbled hodgepodge of science fiction, sexual deviancy, murder, and voyeurism in a period setting, *The Incredible Invasion* (also released as *Invasion Sinistra*, or *Sinister Invasion*) again casts Karloff as a scientist. In the role of Professor Mayer, he is this time engaged in creating some kind of ray which will be a real boon for progress (of what isn't made very clear), when his assistant Isabel (Laura Holly) soaks up and absorbs the ray through the roof and into space, where it catches the attention of a passing alien spacecraft. The aliens resolve to come to earth and destroy Mayer's invention in order to avoid any further potentially dangerous encounters with the ray while hopping through the cosmos. Since they are glowing, vaporous entities, they must enter and control the minds of humans upon arriving on earth, and their first choice is a sex maniac (Yvonne Beirut), who enjoys watching prostitutes fondle themselves before he slashes them to death with a straight razor (quite some first choice).

Mayer is visited by the alien/sex fiend, who arrives with a gift box containing another vaporous alien entity, and upon opening the box Mayer is promptly enslaved. Once inside the professor's mind, however, the alien becomes fascinated by it and postpones destroying the ray, preening instead to tinker around in the professor's laboratory. Meanwhile, the alien in the murderer's body is unable to control the psychosexual tendencies within the brain of the body it inhabits, and so carries on with the killer's sex crimes. This rouses the villagers into an angry mob, which comes to the house and kills the psycho, while Mayer is in the lab trying to wrest control of his own mind from the alien entity which possesses him. It all ends with the usual climactic conflagration.

It's hard to say which aspect of the film is worse, the fractured narrative, bland performances, static camera work, indifferent direction, or hysterical special effects. One peculiarity that deserves mentioning is the disproportionately high number of female characters in the film with physical abnormalities: Mayer's assistant Isabel has horrible scars over most of her face and neck resulting from a lab explosion; the sex maniac's devoted girlfriend walks with a very pronounced limp; and, one of his victims is a deaf, mute woman. Finding some functional purpose within the story for any one of these traits would not be easy—by the time you've collected three, there is a curious and inexplicable pattern. The film's continuity woes are best exemplified by the character of Mayer's niece, Laura (Christa Linder), who slips in and out of a French accent unpredictably.

While it would make nobody's top 10 list of Karloff's better likes, *Macabre Serenade*—also known as *House of Evil*—is most definitely well above both *Fear Chamber* and *The Incredible Invasion*. The film returns Karloff to more familiar old dark house territory, and while it is likely too talkative and leisurely in its pacing for the limited attention span of contemporary audiences, the film's dark—even dreary—ambiance is perfectly in keeping with its setting.

Karloff is cast as Matthias Morteval, an elderly millionaire who invites his remaining relatives to his mansion to say goodbye. In reality, Morteval has an ulterior motive, with the help of his friend and personal physician, Emerick Horbath (Quintin Baines), Morteval has brought his relatives to his estate in order to discover which one is harboring the family curse and thereby threatening to bring disgrace to the family name. Morteval's brother Hugo was something of a mad genius, who created automations—life-size toy soldiers—and went insane after becoming convinced that everybody was staring at him. Hugo wound up going on a killing spree as when bodies again begin turning up same eyes, Morteval fears that another family member has succumbed to Hugo's affliction. With Horbath's assistance, Morteval invites his four remaining kinkfolk to his mansion to identify, and presumably kill, the scourge of the family.



Karloff presiding over the weird rites in *Fear Chamber*.

Assuming that they are heirs, the four guests arrive in time to witness the discovery of the corpse of Morteval's trusted servant Fodor, and then Morteval's own apparent death at a heart attack. The following evening, the four are bumped off one at a time by Hugo's malicious toys until only cousin Lucy Durant (Julissa) and her fiancé Charles Beazler (Andres Garcia) are left. The two wind up in the mansion's dungeon, where they are confronted by Morteval, still very much alive and very much insane.

Yes, the film is dark, bleak, and a bit long-winded, but it still has its points of interest. Despite his age and very poor health, Karloff has seldom been more commanding a presence onscreen, looking very dapper in period wear, playing the pipe organ as his guests arrive, embarrassing and insulting each of them in turn while trying to discern which of them is the killer ("There's a little bit of Hugo in all of you," he tells them).

Unlike the abysmal dimwits of *Fear Chamber* and *The Incredible Invasion*, *Macabre Serenade* gives Karloff one last grand moment at its denouement. Wearing a velvet Edwardian coat, he confronts Julissa and Garcia, then proceeds to sit down at the enormous pipe organ and play his heart out as the house goes up in flames all around him. That moment by itself tops everything from *Fear Chamber* and *The Incredible Invasion*, and even Hill's direction of the Hollywood footage this time shows a spark of inspiration, not merely confining the camera to medium shots, but employing a little motion and even giving us one last memorable close-up of the King of Horror. Shot from a high angle excellently fit so that the shadows accentuate his features, it is a wonderfully classic image of Karloff. Sure, it would have been nice had it come in a better film, but the truth is that both *Snake People* and *Macabre Serenade* are better works than their respective reputations suggest. Even as ill-conceived and badly executed as *Fear Chamber* and *The Incredible Invasion* are, and for the pervasive feeling of their both having been missed opportunities, they at least offered us all a pining glimpse of the King, and to a fan that's still worth something.

A word of caution: For anyone inclined toward giving the Karloff/Vergara films a fair hearing you are advised to avoid the video releases of the 1980s that were issued under the titles *Cut of the Dead* (*Snake People*), *Torture Zone* (*Fear Chamber*), *Alan Terror* (*The Incredible Invasion*), and *Dance of Death* (*Macabre Serenade*). All of these video releases were inexcusable and haphazard edits, which are each short of about 20 minutes of their original running time. That is obviously a very significant amount of footage to drop, but making them even more contemptible is the fact that much of that missing footage consists of dialogue arbitrarily removed from the middle of scenes. These execrable edits are even now available on DVD as well. You have been warned.



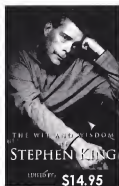
At the pipe organ in *Macabre Serenade*.





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THE EXTERMINATOR URNS ITS WAY TO BLU-RAY

Article by Paul Talbot

"If you're lying, I'll be back," said actor Robert Ginty as he held a burning flame thrower in front of a bound thug's face. Ginty starred as one of the cinema's greatest vigilantes in *The Exterminator* and *Exterminator 2*—two explosive action classics of the 1980s.

Mark Buntzman, producer of the first *Exterminator* and producer/director/writer of the sequel, was born in 1949. As a boy, he grew up in New York where he met James Gluckenhau. "We were neighborhood friends," Buntzman recalls. "We grew up a block from each other." Gluckenhau, director/writer of *The Exterminator*, was born in New York City in 1950. "Neither of us went to film school," Buntzman says. "I took one 'Intro to Filmmaking' course at MIT and Jim had started a little educational film about Einstein at a school, but he hadn't finished it. So in the 'Intro' course at MIT, we took advantage of the facilities and we finished that little ten-minute film."

In 1977 the duo created *The Astrologer* (aka *The Suicide Cult*), an arty science fiction feature made for \$65,000. Buntzman explains, "The *Astrologer* was financed by Jim. I raised a little bit more money and got us a discount on Panavision equipment and [got] all of the grip and electric equipment for free." The two young filmmakers were able to successfully self-distribute their first feature by hand-delivering prints to theaters and drive-ins in the American South. Buntzman continues, "That was, in a sense, our college education. We did everything [including] collecting money from theaters. In that context we pretty well learned what foreign buyers were looking for. So *The Exterminator* was really born out of that."

Buntzman remembers: "Jim and I were at the beach. He had read an article in the [New York] Times. There was outrage about a professor at Columbia University being mugged and paralyzed. We talked about the fact that in a couple days, the world's gonna forget about it but that guy's always gonna be paralyzed. That sort of became the inspiration for *The Exterminator*. Jim sat down and wrote a number of scenes that weren't connected, they were individual vignettes of violence. Then we talked and thought about ways to connect that in a beginning, a middle, and an end. That turned into the screenplay he wrote for *The Exterminator*. But the inspiration was really what the marketplace was looking for. It was the feedback from the foreign distributors that we were focused on. We kind of knew what they wanted. We told them about ideas that we were thinking about for *The Exterminator*. The titular hero in Gluckenhau's vigilante-themed script was Johnny Eastland, a disturbed Vietnam vet who snaps after his best friend is senselessly killed by a NYC gang."

The film's initial \$650,000 budget was provided by Gluckenhau's family. Buntzman says, "The genesis work was probably six months, nine months. Our idea was to take the thing that had the most chance of succeeding even if we didn't do a good job. We didn't have experience, we didn't have industry association. So we tried to take the safest, most explosive thing we could and then we tried to make the best film that we could out of it. When we started, the hope was that we wouldn't completely mess up—that we'd have a beginning, middle, and an end. We felt pretty brazen and full of chutzpah."

As preproduction began in mid-1979, the unknown producer and director sought a recognizable name for the title role. "We had some credibility issues with certain agents," Buntzman says. Joseph Bottoms, who had just completed Disney's *The Black Hole*, was signed for a high fee and a hefty chunk of the profits. But a month before shooting was to begin, Bottoms' agent called Gluckenhau to demand an additional ten grand. The furious director looked for another lead actor and found Robert Ginty.

The Brooklyn-born Ginty was a 31-year-old former rock drummer and Yale drama student. The 6-foot-2 actor had been on Broadway, in movies like *Coming Home*, and on TV as a regular on *Bee Bee Black Sheep* and *The Paper Chase*. Ginty recalled, "My agent called and said that a picture called *The Exterminator* was in production and that, for some reason, the lead was going to be replaced within 24 hours. I read the script, loved it, and flew to New York that night." Ginty had real-life experience with the subject matter. When he was a teenager, he and his best friend were attacked by a gang. The friend was shot dead.

Joseph Bottoms was out, but two "names" were added to the cast. Christopher George played the burnt-out cop who tracks down the vigilante. The rugged actor was known for the TV series *The Rat Patrol* plus drive-in hits like *Divide and Conquer* and *Grazzo*. British Oscar nominee Samantha Eggar (*The Collector*, *Doctor Dolittle*) played the superfluous role of a doctor who dates the cop.

IN WAR,
YOU HAVE
TO KILL TO
STAY ALIVE...
ON THE
STREETS OF
NEW YORK,
IT'S OFTEN
THE SAME.



THE EXTERMINATOR

...the man they pushed too far.

The part of Jefferson, Eastland's ill-fated Nam buddy, went to Steve James, a 27-year-old African-American actor, martial artist, and stuntman, who had done bits and stunts in New York-shot features like *The Wiz* and *The Warriors* (see *Baseball Fury*).

In September of 1979, *The Exterminator* started eight weeks of principal photography. One of the best things about *The Exterminator* is how it captures the sleazy, late-70s New York City ambience. Some of the denizens that Ginty passes onscreen were real street dwellers. Buntzman says, "It was about 40 days [shooting] in New York. We actually shot in locations in Times Square. The thing I remember best was slicking the camera in a cardboard box with some holes in it and our cinematographer walked down the street holding it and walked through the crowd. [Laughs] A couple things like that, we stole. A lot of the stuff was written to be shot at the Bronx Terminal Market, which was an area that my family controlled. [The now-defunct produce distribution center covered 32 acres near Yankee Stadium.] The stuff on the loading docks; when they go inside and a guy is paying off the mafia, and out back where Ginty's character is attacked. And the car chase where the motorcycle jumps and the car goes over the elevated road. [Stuntman usually jump a light bike. We actually used a full, heavyweight bike to do the jump. Buntzman appears in this scene as a burping, booze-guzzling thug ("Let's finish the mother-fucker").]

Buntzman recalls, "We had some issues with special effects that were maddening. We'd have situations where we'd need a gunshot and there'd be no bullets. Some of it was very primitive. There's a scene where the Steve James character is being mugged and a garden claw is jammed into his back and twisted. That special effect amounted to me going to the grocery store and getting a big basket of beef, putting it under his shirt, taking a tool from my mom's garden, taping it to my wrist, and jamming his back. [Laughs] We had a number of things that happened that were super anxiety provoking. There's a scene with an attack dog. On the day we get there to shoot and the dog shows up—it's a puppy. It's the sweetest little puppy and he can't attack anything. So we shoot the scene where the Exterminator is going through the house and the dog attacks him and he's rolling on the floor with the dog biting him and he stabs the dog. The truth is that that dog didn't do anything and Bob was actually holding the dog onto him and shoving his arm in the dog's face and the dog's turning his face away. We thought, 'This is a disaster! How could those people show up with that for an attack dog?' It was terrible and we were upset. I asked [the editor] to stop what she was doing and cut that scene because we were scheduling another day to re-shoot it and I wanted to see what we had. She cut this scene and put some sound effects of dog squealing to it and it came out wonderful and it was a real big surprise. When we had the MPAA rating the film, one of the things that was just too violent for them was the dog scene and we had to cut it down. I had to laugh because what they were actually looking at is a puppy dog turning his face away from an arm."

Buntzman remembers Christopher George as a modest man. "I had a conversation with him," the producer says. "And one of the feelings he expressed to me is: he never had some sense like he was ever going to get hired again and that some kid in New York would just decide to offer him a job. He didn't know why that would happen."

"When we had largely edited the film," Buntzman says, "we saw we had a beginning, a middle, and an end and it was actually working. And people that had come by the editing room were anxious for us to finish it and offer it for sale. Then we had the idea that we could shoot a Vietnam sequence and raise the whole image of the film." In the original script, the movie's dialogue explained that the Exterminator and his friend had a traumatic war experience in their past, but the combat scenes weren't going to be shown.

The opening war images—with explosions and a helicopter—were shot in a wooded area of Indian Dunes, California. Buntzman says, "I did four weeks of prep for four days of shooting, which was a wonderful thing. I had time to get all the special effects designed. Jim had to be away for some of the prep so I had to do the local casting. He was able to get there just in time to shoot. *Apocalypse Now* had come out and had grandeur and spectacular stuff, so we went the other way. Instead of the grandeur, we concentrated on a small canvas and decided to do more with the helicopter than anybody had done. [We used] some really top-notch special effects people. It came out spectacular. We had all the equipment and helicopters, planes crashing in the river, exotic animals and a crew of 150 people. I remember looking around and thinking, 'This was a dream in our heads just two years ago, just some ideas that we were writing down on a piece of paper,' and it had become that real." The California shoot included the film's opening image of an explosion blowing a U.S. soldier off a high mountain. Buntzman says, "We talked about starting [the film] with action. What could be more action than if the first frame is an explosion out of darkness? So we shot that and we had five cameras going."

The brutal scene where Eastland and comrades are tortured by the Viet Cong included *The Exterminator's* most notorious image: a grisly beheading supervised by the late effects legend Stan Winston. It took Winston and three assistants two months to create the effect, which cost the filmmakers \$25,000. The "head" was filled with a complicated series of springs and cables and covered with flesh-colored latex and a wig. Winston said, "The head was literally hinged so it could come up and the seam wouldn't show when the machete went through the neck. On the set there were seven of us in this little hut operating the body—keeping the blood pumping, air gurgling through the trachea, and the breathing going. It was literally pulling strings to operate the eyes rolling back into the head, and the eyelid and jaw movement for the scream." The effect was shot over twelve times with multiple cameras running at different speeds.

Buntzman and Gluckenhauz wanted *The Exterminator* finished in time to be sold at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1980. Buntzman recalls, "It was the first film mixed in Dolby in New York City. We emptied my office and filled it with editing equipment and we were cutting all the tracks. Meanwhile, the [Dolby] studio wasn't finished and was being built and it was like, 'Oh, my God, they gotta get done!' It pretty much finished perfectly as far as timing. [We decided that] we would promote the film, go [to Cannes], rent a theater, do the PR, and do the advertising on our nickel." The prologue and additional tweaking had raised the budget from \$880,000 to just under \$2 million. The Vietnam sequence cost \$400,000—about 20 percent of the final budget.

Buntzman: "We got the largest screening room in Cannes and we brought a lot of kids into the theater to make sure that it was packed and standing-room-only. I remember running with the print and hand-punching the red-charge marks in the theater as people were coming in, just barely getting it ready. [Laughs] A thousand people came to the screening, but the theater only had 600 seats. Many top distributors had to stand or sit on the floor. During the beheading, a man started to vomit. Buntzman says, "About six minutes into the film, someone passed out and was carried out in an ambulance. The people loved the screening and right after, a Japanese distributor offered more than our asking price for the film." [The Japanese rights went to the company Joy Pack for \$350,000.] "Within a couple days, we were—on paper at least, in contracts—in profit on the film. It was certainly surprising to be the number-one film over there. At the same time, it was a situation where we had to make decisions about stuff we really knew nothing about, so it was scary as well. There were questions about censorship. I was afraid [if we sold] Southeast Asia the film and [it didn't] pass their censors, they'd just bootleg it and we'd lose it. I'd heard all kinds of stuff like that. It was exciting, but it was unnerving. And then of course, we still had to come back to the States and sell it domestically."

North American rights were picked up by Avco Embassy Pictures. The small (but aggressive) distributor had recent success with low-budget, violent genre movies like *Phantasm*, *The Fog* and *Prom Night*. But the hard violence in *The Exterminator* almost prevented it from getting seen in the U.S. Forty-seven seconds of grisly images, including most of the beheading and a shot of the burnt "chicken hawk" pimp, had to be cut from the film to secure an R rating. *The Exterminator* was set loose in New York on September 10, 1980.

Buntzman: "I think we did \$1 million the first week in New York City. We felt pretty great." Grindhouse patrons were delighted with this skuzzy, twisted movie that went farther than most exploitation epics of the era. After playing in only 125 cinemas, *The Exterminator* was number one on *Variety's* chart of the 80 top-grossing movies for September and ultimately grossed \$4 million in U.S. ticket sales. The total worldwide grosses—after foreign, TV, and home video sales—was \$35 million.

Grady said, "The Exterminator is being accepted because everyone knows that everyone in New York is terrified. Even the most liberal have become frustrated. We now have a Wild West situation in the cities. I was brought up in New York, and I know what I'm talking about. There's not a person in the city who isn't aware of the violence on the streets. All he can do is hope that he won't become a victim. When I go back to New York and see how frightened everyone is, I think the vigilante philosophy is justified."



Stan Winston and friend.

The Exterminator became one of the most beloved entries in the vigilante genre. But James Gluckenhauz and Mark Buntzman didn't immediately start on an *Exterminator 2*. Buntzman explains, "I don't think either of us realized that the sequel had value at that time. I think Jim needed to see what he could do on his own. So we really didn't have much contact after that. We very much went our separate ways. I ended up with the sequel rights." After *The Exterminator*, Gluckenhauz wrote and directed other action thrillers like *The Soldier*, *Shakedown* and *Slaughter of the Innocents*. He now works on Wall Street as a financial advisor.

Buntzman: "I was at dinner with some foreign buyers. One of the buyers was a video distributor from England and he told me that *The Exterminator* was actually the largest grossing video in England—ever. He said at that moment it was bigger than *Star Wars*. And he said, 'I will give you a million dollars for worldwide video rights for *Exterminator 2*.' I said, 'Well, what kind of film are you talking about? Is that a million-dollar film? Is that a \$600,000 film? Is it a \$4 million film?' He said, 'It's a film that has a beginning, a middle, and an end and has the name *Exterminator 2* on it. The rest is up to you.' Then I started thinking about what to do. I started talking to friends and there was a whole group of people that were saying, 'Make a half-million-dollar film or a million-dollar film. Get all your money from [the English deal]. You've got all the rest of the rights and you'll make a fortune.' I felt like that would be—my very first time out by myself—ripping the industry off and ripping the public off even more. So I thought, 'What's the best thing I can do?' The idea I had was to make it a helicopter film. This was before *Blue Thunder*."

Buntzman planned to raise more money for the sequel by pre-selling distribution rights at the American Film Market, which was taking place in California in November of 1982. He recalls, "It was six weeks before AFM, which was at the Holiday Inn on Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood. I applied for a billboard on Wilshire Boulevard and on the morning that the film market opened, it opened to a 30-foot tall billboard that faced the [hotel]. The artwork had *Exterminator* and his girlfriend and the futuristic helicopter—the likes of which no one had ever seen—and the logo E2: *Exterminator 2*. That created a huge stir. Some people thought it was horrible and should be torn down. Other people thought it was a great gimmick."

William Sachs, a filmmaker who worked with Burtzman on the promotion, recalls, "We did some cool stuff. There was an empty lot across the street and we landed a helicopter there—a real military helicopter—and everybody freaked out."

Burtzman: "I had a foreign sales agent and he started making sales. We quickly did about \$2 million in sales and we were projecting that the foreign marketplace alone was going to net me about \$5 million. It was the most successful sales campaign that anybody had ever done in the foreign marketplace. The marketplace didn't seem to care that I hadn't been credited as a writer and director of a film before. It was an enormously exciting, bewildering, and successful moment. So my idea was to make the most expensive film I could, spend all of the money I got [from] foreign [sales] making the best film I could and then I would still own domestic rights free and clear."

"But that quickly ground to a stop because I got blackmailed by a couple guys. I was getting told by foreign distributors that they were looking at a piece of paper these guys had that said they had the rights. I didn't know what they were talking about. So I went to file a lawsuit against them. I didn't have any documents that could assure buyers that I really did have the rights. I didn't have an insurance company saying I did. So the buyers stopped putting down their deposits and that whole thing just ground to a stop. It took me several months to find these characters to serve them. And it took me an entire year to finally get them to admit that they didn't have any rights. They tried to make themselves partners with me and I wouldn't have anything to do with them. Once they acknowledged that they didn't have any rights, then I got the insurance and that was just two days before I happened to have this chance meeting with Cannon."

The Cannon Group was an independent company run by the Israeli cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus. The pair had produced a number of unsuccessful "prestigious" pictures but their steady stream of formula action pictures (with reliable stars like Charles Bronson and Chuck Norris) kept their factory running and satisfied VHS and cable addicts. Cannon had recently signed a lucrative deal with major studio MGM to handle the North American theatrical and video releases of their features.

Burtzman: "I was meeting with Cannon. I had a guy [William Sachs] working for me who was a director. We were trying to get a film done for him."

Sachs had worked on dozens of features since the late 1960s and was best known as the writer-director of *The Incredible Melting Man* and *Galaxina*. He recalls, "I had a project called *Cowgirl* that we were putting together. It was a revenge picture about a female country star whose husband got killed. We had Tanya Tucker [attached] at one time."

Burtzman: "So I met with Menahem about possibly doing this other film and Menahem asked me what the best project I had was. I said, 'Well, it's *The Exterminator*. But it's not for you.' He said, 'Of course, it's for me. We're gonna be able to guarantee you a gross participation from MGM. Your first movie as a director will be distributed by MGM, and we'll give you part of the foreign sales and you'll have complete creative control and we'll give you this much money. Of course you want to do it with us.' It might have been a deal with the devil but it was also an offer I couldn't refuse. I always thought you had to be really careful with these guys. But I thought I was gonna be getting a gross piece from MGM and also from foreign sales, plus the fees, plus creative control. I didn't know what else I could ask for. It turned out there was plenty."

The *Cowgirl* movie was dead, but Sachs was given work on the *Exterminator* sequel. Burtzman explains, "When I was shooting [*Exterminator 2*], I either had to let [Sachs] go or keep him working for me. He had a wife and a new baby, so I told him to come along. He was just assisting. At that time, he insisted he didn't want credit and I said I was going to make him a co-producer."

Exterminator 2 went into preproduction as soon as Cannon made the deal and shooting was to begin in early 1984. Burtzman: "That gave me 90 days to write a screenplay. And it had to be a completely new idea because during that period *Blue Thunder* had come out and the novelty of a futuristic helicopter had been fully exploited better than I ever could have. So I took a completely different turn and I kind of tongue-in-cheek, made a film where instead of a helicopter, it was a garbage truck. And I tried to make a movie that had a language of music and dance buried in it—with less-than-asthetically superior because the studio wasn't really fond of that idea. [Laughs] What happened with Cannon was a train wreck from day one. I had foreign sales, they wanted these sales, and as soon as I made a deal with them they really didn't care about the film anymore. From that moment on, I was in the way of their just making the cheapest thing they could do and collecting what they could from the contracts. So we were at loggerheads from day one."

Burtzman's final screenplay had John Eastland and his black sidekick "Be Gee" working as New York City garbage men. When Eastland leads a vicious drug-dealing gang led by the flamboyant "X," the Exterminator and Be Gee turn their garbage truck into an armored and armed vigilante machine.

Burtzman: "My contract provided for a minimum of eight weeks of prep and for the first six weeks I sat in my hotel room waiting for them to start. Until they got some changes to the agreement, they wouldn't start the film. We ended up trying to do a special effects movie with one-and-a-half weeks prep. To do an eight or ten-week shoot with one-and-a-half weeks prep was chaos and it compromised everything."

The first *Exterminator* had turned Robert Ginty into a bankable international action star and he followed it with violent overseas movies like *Warriors of the Lost World* and *White Fire*. He came back to New York to reprise his first action lead in *Exterminator 2*.

Sachs recalls, "I kind of knew there was gonna be trouble when Mark [Burtzman] and I went to New York and met with Bob Ginty for lunch. Bob came in with pages of notes of how he wanted to play the character and what he wanted to do. They were intelligent, good notes. And Mark wouldn't listen to him."

There was no love interest for John Eastland in the first film, but for the sequel Burtzman created Caroline, a *Flashdance*-style performer who becomes involved with the vigilante. The role was played by Deborah Gaffner, a slurring actress-dancer known for the Broadway musical *A Chorus Line* and the film *All That Jazz*.

Gaffner recalls, "I hadn't seen or heard of the first *Exterminator* before my involvement with the sequel. I was asked to do the film by Edward Love with whom I had acted in *A Chorus Line* on Broadway. He was the choreographer [for *Exterminator 2*]. I was his only choice. He asked me to rehearse with him, and he choreographed a dance. I didn't like the extreme violence in the script, but [Love] told me that he and Mark Burtzman were trying to turn out a small cult classic like *Liquid Sky*. That was his vision of the film anyway, which turned out to be entirely different from Robert Ginty's vision and Golan and Globus' vision. He asked Mark to come to the studio and watch me, after which Mark was completely taken with me. I read for him right there, and he offered me the part right away. Ed put me in touch with a very avant-garde new costume designer whom he wanted to use to give Caroline and the X gang a distinctive look. He came to my apartment and created a dance costume on me by draping about five yards of black fabric on me and then rapping it and redraping while it was on me. I found the Norma Kamali high-heeled sneakers I danced in. I kept them and washed the fake blood off. Both my daughters were there to their proms."

The stocky, acclaimed New York stage actor Frankie Faison was cast as trash collector Be Gee. A charismatic, wall-bust actor-model named Mario Van Peebles got one of his first big roles as the gang leader "X."

Sachs explains, "His name is X [because] Mark couldn't decide what name to give him, so he kept putting an 'X' in the script and eventually that was his name! [Laughs]"

Gaffner recalls, "Mario Van Peebles is a wonderful actor and was a total professional at all times. He created a lot of his own character including his costumes. His character was supposed to be a dirty, ragged version of a street gang leader. He took that in a whole other, very interesting direction. He was very congenial off the set, but when we were on set together, I have a memory of him staying in character which included being somewhat distant and aloof."

Hulking actor Irvin Keyes—who had played a villain in the first entry—was back as a chain-smoking member of the X gang. Sachs says, "He's got a screwy, I knew him from when I lived in New York. A friend of mine once made me a space rack and [Keyes] came with him to deliver it."

Playing the roller-skating thug "Eyes" was Scott Randall. Sachs explains, "Mark and I found the skater while walking down the streets. He was a guy that skated on the street and you'd put money in his hat."

David Burtzman, father of Mark, played a cane-tapping, drug-supplying Marfoso. The elder Burtzman controlled the locations where much of the first *Exterminator* was shot, and more of his property was used for the sequel. Mark Burtzman explains, "My family had purchased what had been the Washburn Wire Factory in Manhattan on the upper East Side. It was three blocks along the East River, I used that as my studio. The big interior fight scene—where the garbage truck shoots the gang and rolls over some cars—that's all interiors in one of our buildings. The bar [set] was built in one of the empty buildings."

Gaffner recalls, "Most of the 'indoor' scenes were filmed in an abandoned warehouse. It was February, the dead of winter. We were shooting in New York at night, and this vast, dusty warehouse had no heating whatsoever. For some reason one of the walls in the huge space where I was dancing was completely gone. So we were basically outside. I would huddle in front of a space heater in my down jacket and down pants until it was time to peel them off and dance. I always tried to wait until the last second: Robert Ginty was about to get married at the time, and he was in the middle of filming his violent movie, pretending to kill people and have an affair. I was just recently married myself, and we had some interesting conversations about his desire to have this beautiful, pure marriage, how that affected what he was doing in the role, and how the role was affecting him. The *Exterminator* franchise was his. The film was resting on his shoulders and I'm sure he felt a lot of responsibility for the way it would turn out."





Robert Ginty and Deborah Geffner.



**The X gang attacks
Caroline (Deborah Geffner).**



**Scott Randolph, Mario Van Peebles,
David Buntzman.**

One of the odder moments in Exterminator 2 is when the vignette and his girlfriend stop to watch some street dancers in Central Park. Buntzman says, "When I did this film, the only breakdance stuff that had happened anywhere was in Flashdance. The breakdancers in my film were just guys off the street. I got these guys and I shot a bunch of breakdance stuff and I took that to Cannon. I met with Menahem and Yoram and I said, 'We really should do a breakdance movie.' They told me they weren't interested. Then one day, an editor told me that Cannon had him cut out the [Exterminator 2] breakdance footage and cut it together like a trailer and they used that to pre-sell Breakin'."

Several elaborate action scenes in Buntzman's script ended up being only partially shot or completely discarded by Cannon, including a scene where Eastland and Caroline are attacked in the moving garbage truck by the X gang, a sequence where an exploding helicopter blows out the windows of the bar and injures several patrons, and a junkyard vignette where a thug is scooped up by a crane and dropped into an incinerator. Buntzman: "Stuff like that just got shifted to the end of the shoot. I didn't get to shoot the script that I started out at."

Sachs recalls, "[Buntzman's] big problem in the whole thing was indecision. That was the biggest problem all the way through. They'd give him a choice of wardrobe and he couldn't pick. He'd say, 'I'll tell you later,' and he would never pick. I think the culminating problem happened in the scene in the subway downstairs. He couldn't decide where to put the camera and everybody had a meeting and everyone was telling him where to put the camera. It went on for, like, an hour. The DP had an idea, the script supervisor had an idea, the wardrobe person. And he just stood there. It was horrible to watch. It was sickening. Time got wasted. He was kind of overwhelmed. It took too long since he couldn't make his mind up and didn't know what he was doing."

Buntzman: "At a certain point [Cannon] just wrapped. They wanted to stop. They weren't happy. They said, 'Okay, we're stopping.' They arbitrarily just pulled the plug and said to me, 'You're gonna have to find a way to write a beginning, a middle, and an end that connects all the missing pieces in a few days of shooting.'"

Sachs remembers the last scene shot in New York: "It's the scene where Ginty puts the kid in the back of the garbage truck. Ginty wouldn't come out of his motor home. He was mad because Buntzman was making him look bad. He was giving him bad directions. I guess. He didn't know how to talk to the actors [Ginty] didn't want to ruin his career by looking stupid. I got Ginty out of the motor home. I said, 'You can direct that scene.' So he came out and directed the scene. Mark was gone that day. He was fired [as director] because the budget was supposed to be \$1.5 million and I had gotten to be over \$3 million and he had about 40 minutes of the movie shot. That's why [Cannon] fired him." Cannon closed the Exterminator 2 shop in New York and moved it to Los Angeles.

Buntzman: "[Cannon] wanted a screening [of the footage] in a week-and-a-half or two. We ended up being pressured to screen it for them in two weeks. [After watching the screening] they said, 'Oh, okay, good.' Then they said they wanted to screen it again a week later. I tried an [editing] experiment on something to see if it was gonna work or not. It actually made the film a little worse, but that was just an experiment. Protesting, I screened it again and after the screening, Menahem came out furious [and said,] 'The film's worse! I thought you were a director? It's my mistake!' Making a big scene, I later realized that this was all a performance that was really getting around the fact that they didn't have the rights to distribute the film anymore and I had tremendous leverage with them that they didn't want me to ever find out about. They had lost their deal with MGM. Without their deal with MGM, they couldn't distribute the film. That was my deal that it was going to go through MGM. So they had to somehow pressure me into allowing them to distribute the film themselves. That's pretty much what all this was about. I didn't find this out till much later."

MGM had become increasingly disappointed with Cannon's movies and the distribution deal ended acrimoniously in June 1984. Golan and Globus were forced to create their own distribution unit to handle their product. Buntzman: "With this argument going on, we needed to shoot [additional] scenes and Bill [Sachs] was working for me. [Cannon] said, 'Well, it'll be okay if you work with Bill on this.'"

Sachs was known in the industry as a "film doctor." He explains, "I've fixed 25 movies. They knew about it at Cannon. They were gonna get someone else [to take over Exterminator 2] and [Buntzman] asked me if I would do it. I didn't really want to because he was kind of a friend and I knew I couldn't work with him [on set] because he was gonna want to discuss it with me and never decide. When I took over, I had to rewrite it. There was only 40 minutes of the movie done so I had to shoot the rest of it. I did the whole movie over, basically. It was so intricate making everything work. It was like an engineering plan because there was no movie. It was just a bunch of scenes that didn't make sense and didn't connect. Less than half was shot. Sometimes [Buntzman] didn't finish shooting a scene. I wrote in the script, 'insert here, put this here; get a shot of this here.' It was like a puzzle and a challenge that I had to solve. I didn't get paid much. It was just a weekly salary."

Sachs continues, "I didn't have any of the actors and I had to shoot 40 or 60 percent of the movie. Girty was working on some other movie—they hadn't even started shooting—and they were holding up Cannon for like \$50,000 to let him do this. Cannon was freaking out. Then Deborah Geffner's agent wanted a fortune. I didn't have Frankie Faison, but [his character] was dead already. So I took Mario—who had a smallish part, he didn't have many scenes—and I kind of made him the lead. He's terrific and I thought he'd be a star. I was trying to figure out how to make the movie without the lead actors. There's one scene where [Girty] is pimping-out the garbage truck and he's holding a torch then takes off the welding mask. He only wore the welding mask when he was doing that scene. So that gave me the idea to have the [Exterminator] with the welding mask running around with a flame thrower. That whole thing wasn't in the movie originally. I used stunt guys with masks on and [that] one shot where [Girty] takes the mask off and you see his face."

The Exterminator's girlfriend lived throughout Buntzman's script but she didn't survive the final film. A high angle shot of the naked Caroline laying face down on her bed with an "X" painted on her back was filmed to indicate that she had been killed by the gang. Sachs explains, "I had to kill Deborah Geffner. I didn't have her. I put a body double on the bed. It was this young girl that came with her mother and the mother had to supervise it. [Laughs] So that's how I killed her off." (The double was Shannon Rose who later appeared in several issues of *Playboy's* *Book of Lingerie*.)

Sachs: "I had a really complicated scene on the first day of shooting in L.A. There was a shoot on a Monday. I went [to the set] with a small crew the Friday before. Not only did we work out every shot, but we put chalk marks on the floor where the camera would go. Over the weekend I came down with the flu and 104-degree fever. I showed up in a wheelchair because I couldn't even stand up. We got done ahead of schedule because everybody knew all the shots."

"I did the whole beginning where you don't see [Exterminator's] face and he's got the [police] scanner. I did the grocery store, the burn in the alley way. I did everything in the clubhouse: the scene with all the TV sets, the stuff on the elevator with the one-armed push-up, the big speech with the fire. I did everything with the flamethrower, like when the brother was killed in the tree. I did that in a parking lot in L.A. We had to bring a garbage truck from New York because the garbage trucks in New York are made of steel and the ones [in L.A.] are fiberglass. So a garbage truck had to drive across country. We had to dirty the streets and paint the curbs and put in hydrants and try to make it look like New York. Mark would come by the set and they'd chase him away because I couldn't work if he was trying to tell everybody what to do. At one point I was doing a scene and I happened to look off to the side and I saw the script supervisor chasing him away. But I felt sorry for him because I liked the guy. He was a decent guy. I just had to do what was necessary for the movie. It was difficult because I really wanted to let him be involved but I couldn't."

David Buntzman came from New York to finish shooting his role. Sachs says, "It was weird because I had to direct the father after the son was fired. But I don't think he really cared. He just wanted to be in the movie. I thought he was really good."

Sachs recalls filming the grisly images of the elderly couple getting killed in their store. "I insisted on having the gun go off and the squid go off in the same frame. When we shot it, it was one take and worked perfectly. The DP almost passed out when he saw it. He turned around and looked at me—he was pale—and said, 'That's the most realistic thing I've ever seen in my life.' Of course, the MPAA felt the same. I had eight or nine [gun] shots and they kept saying we can't have it. So I would take off one shot and send it back and they'd reject it. I'd take off another shot and send it back. We finally negotiated a quick cut of one shot. It was probably good that they [cut] it because it was really upsetting. When you're shooting [and] you blow people up and you have heads chopped off, it's all great fun. But you don't realize how it affects somebody's people."



Cops confront Mario Van Peebles in a scene deleted from *Exterminator 2*.

Buntzman's original script climaxed with the Exterminator being bound by X to busy subway tracks before Caroline arrives to fatally shoot the villain. Buntzman explains, "None of that was shot."

Sachs wrote and directed an ending where the masked vigilante and X stalk each other in a warehouse before the gang leader gets blown up by a concealed grenade. Sachs says, "We shot the ending in Vernon, California, at a steel plant. It's a giant complex. It was dangerous because [the stuntman] running around that steel plant up in the rafters on narrow walkways. It was like 100 feet in the air with spikes below. The gaffer, the grips, no one would go up there. I had the special effects guys go up there and rig lights because it was so scary up there."

The scene ends with Van Peebles' character falling to his death. Sachs: "Joe Gibrada, who was one of the ones that did the burn in the alley way, was gonna do [the fall]. He used to set himself on fire for carnivals and fall 100 feet into a pool. Then someone complained and SAG [Screen Actors Guild] protested because you have to double a black actor with a black stuntman. I'd met Mario's mother, whose a blonde-haired, blue-eyed German woman. [Laughs] But he's considered black. We could not find one black stuntman willing to do it. It was dangerous because there were spikes. If you miss, you get impaled. And it was falling backwards on fire. Finally they talked Julio LeFloore, who was a [black] firefighter/stuntman, into doing it. The stunt coordinator, went through it with him [and] put gel on him. Just before we shot, he wiped his mustache with his hand which took the gel off. He burned the tip of his nose. Not a terrible burn, but he had to go to the hospital. It was a real shame. Plus, the stunt wasn't done well. It was supposed to be falling and you could barely see movement in one err. But he still won a Stuntman of the Year award for the best high fall."

The film closed with a cool image of the Exterminator walking away from the camera as he discards his welder garb and flame thrower. Sachs says, "I loved my last shot, when he goes off into the whiteness. We took a white sheet and put every light we had on the other side and had him walk into it. I didn't leave it [onscreen] forever, but it goes until he becomes like a skeleton and disappears."

Editing was done at the Cannon facilities in Los Angeles. Sachs: "I think I shot most of the movie by the end. I think everything [Buntzman] shot, or parts of it, is in the movie."

Buntzman: "I was initially working with the composer. And then, at a certain point, I was locked out of the editing room. Up till that time, I didn't know that Bill Sachs had changed his loyalties through the shooting. He became a functionary of Cannon and that was a little bit of a surprise. I had become persons non grata because I started to get in a lawsuit with [Cannon] about distribution."

Sachs: "I didn't ban him. I stayed friendly with him. We had a big screening and [Golan and Globus] were all excited. Menahem would introduce me to people: 'Here's Bill Sachs. If you have a movie in trouble, call Bill. If the elevator broken, I call Bill!'"

Promotional materials distributed prior to the film's release billed Buntzman as the lone writer and director. But Sachs wanted credit for the many scenes he was responsible for. He says, "I was in the Writers Guild, so we went to the Writers Guild. They get a bunch of scripts and they have like, five people read it and give their determinations. The Guild decided it. We shared [writing credit]. There wasn't a [Directors Guild arbitration]. [Cannon] wanted to give me co-director credit. I wasn't in the DGA [Directors Guild of America] yet, neither of us were. David Buntzman sued Cannon so Mark could have the directing credit and not have to share it. [Cannon] gave in and said [Buntzman] would have the sole directing credit. That lawsuit pleased me off, him trying to steal my credit. So I just put my credit right at the end: 'Additional scenes directed by William Sachs.' Buntzman flipped out and got all upset about that. I actually ran into him a few years later and he was okay. He's a good guy."

Exterminator 2 was the second film (after *Boiler*) that Cannon distributed themselves after their breakup with MGM. The Exterminator sequel opened in 535 American theaters on September 14, 1984—almost exactly four years after the first entry hit screens.

Buntzman "I remember seeing it in Manhattan. [Laughs] I was more than a little embarrassed at some of the changes that had happened. I was certainly disappointed. I had something slightly different in mind when we started out."

Sachs: "I don't love the movie. It's a fun film. I would have done it differently if I'd done the whole thing. But I had to follow what [Buntzman] did and keep it the same style."

Geffner: "I first saw the movie in Hollywood after it opened. I went with my husband and a director friend, who both thought it would be great fun. I went incognito—dark glasses and everything. There was a family in the row right in front of us with really young children—five and eight-years-old. They sat through all this violence and blood and torture, and then, when the love scene came on, they put their hands over their children's eyes, and left the theater in horror! I was so glad I was wearing a dark hoodie so they wouldn't know it was me. I was interested to see the scenes that I hadn't filmed at all. In one of them, two actors doubling as Caroline and Johnny were walking to Caroline's apartment, shot from behind. You hear my voice and Bob's saying dialogue from a different part of the movie. The company had contacted me about coming to L.A. to do re-shoots, but Bob wasn't available, so it fell through. And then there was 'my death scene.' Please understand that in the movie that I shot in New York, Caroline lived. In the movie they released, suddenly... there was Caroline face down on the floor, naked, with a red 'X' on her, and, worst of all, fat! Not only that—it looked to me like the naked dead person may have been a boy. Quite a shock all in all."

The sequel opened at #10 on the charts and collected \$1.2 million in its first week. Within a month it was gone from theaters after a total gross of only \$3.7 million at U.S. screens. Buntzman: "It was one of the first films that Cannon distributed themselves and it was a fairly clumsy, last-minute situation. [Exterminator 2] had foreign sales that were good. The video sales were pretty big and the television sales were pretty big."

An *Exterminator 3* was discussed. Buntzman: "Cannon actually tried to get the rights from me for that. Any number of people have approached me and some folks attempted to license it for a television series. I had a number of meetings about that."

Sachs immediately followed the *Exterminator* sequel with the Cannon teen sex comedy *Hot Chick* (1985). He did later "film doctor" work on *Servants of Twilight* (1991) and *Leprechaun* (1993) and directed *Spooky House* (2000).

Buntzman and Van Peebles teamed up later to form Ivan Gaim Productions and made the thriller *Love Kills* in 1999.

Ginty continued to star in action movies like *Mission: Kill*, *Out on Bail*, and *The Bounty Hunter*. (One was even called *The Retaliator*.) He went on to direct live theater, direct-to-video features, TV episodes, and Disney theme park movies in IMAX and 3-D. He died of cancer, at age 61, in 2009. Sachs says, "Ginty was a good guy. I stayed friends with him. It's sad that he died."

Buntzman recalls working with Ginty: "It was an uneven experience. Robert was a good actor and I think he aspired to do some much more intellectual projects. He had a love/hate relationship with his [Exterminator] character. When he would get into character—which was a very angry character—he would tend to be angry, which made him hard to work with at those times. He would also apologize to me, sometimes, later. We finished out a situation, the shooting [of *Exterminator 2*], when he was quite angry. And then I saw him much later and he was apologetic and wanted to be friends and hang out and we did. And he would ask me advice. He was trying to get a studio off the ground in Ireland and he'd meet with me about that. So I think he regretted some of his behavior."

For years, fans have discussed rumors about the existence of an *Exterminator 2* "work print" that was prepared prior to the cut that Cannon released. Buntzman: "There probably is a work print. I thought I had a copy of something, but I haven't been able to locate anything. There's just an outside, small chance, that I may have something. But I don't think so. There is a bunch of stuff that was shot that isn't in the film."

Sachs: "Extra scenes? We didn't have enough scenes! [Laughs]"

Although Robert Ginty is dead, Buntzman says there may still be more *Exterminator* adventures: "The agreement I have with Jim [Glackenhaus] is that the first *Exterminator* could get remade without the two of us. So any of the exploitation of the future rights, all of which I control, would not be a remake. If there's a number 3, I think it will have its own original flavor to it. It may yet happen."



Spanish ad for *Exterminator 2*.

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Saving Lost Souls

Criterion Restores a Horror Classic

Interviews by Tom Weaver

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Classic Horror Film Board's yearly "Rondo Award" will have to find a new winner in the category "Film Most in Need of DVD Release." After six straight years of *Island of Lost Souls* (1932) as the Most Wanted title, it's finally coming to DVD and Blu-ray—and from the prestigious Criterion Collection, no less!

October 25 was the release date for this no-holds-barred terror tale based on the H.G. Wells novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and *Scream* commemorates this *Monster Kid* mega-event with the following two interviews. In the first, Criterion's Manhattan-based Susan Arosteguy talks about the challenges of assembling a top-quality print and discusses the bonus material she produced; in the second, horror movie historian Greg Mank gives us a preview of the audio commentary he provided. Both interviews were conducted by *Scream* stalwart Tom Weaver.

INTERVIEW WITH CRITERION'S SUSAN AROSTEGUY

SCREEN: How did *Island of Lost Souls* come Criterion's way?

SUSAN AROSTEGUY: We have a long-standing relationship with Universal and we've licensed a lot of pictures from them. *Lost Souls* was one of those titles that's always been on our list of things that we wanted to do, but as everybody knows, Universal never really got around to it. But finally it's happened, and we think it's a great opportunity to put out this film that we all love so much.

Why did you think Universal dragged their feet?

I don't know for sure, I can't speak for them, but I'm sure it had something to do with the elements—the lack of good elements, I should say—on the film. It was a challenge for us to put the restored digital master together. First, we did a "best light" of a 35mm fine grain master positive that Universal had. It proved to be really good, but it had some inherent problems; for example, the sound was not great. And Universal didn't have any other film elements then, Lee Kline and Maria Palazzola, Criterion's Telecine supervisors, found a 35mm nitrate composite positive at UCLA Film Archives, so we transferred that. But that had other issues.

Splices and scratches?

More scratches than anything. Splices are actually easy for us to remove in digital restoration, but the scratches—like long-running vertical scratches—were absolutely horrible. And the sound was bad on that print, too—unbelievably muffled. So we talked to a private collector named Rich Scriver and borrowed his 16mm print, and surprisingly, the sound was way better than anything else we'd found. We had to then QC [quality-check] all three elements back to back next to each other and pick out the best parts from each element and combine them. While one element would have [for instance] a long-running white scratch, the other would have a long-running black scratch in the same place [laughs]. It was very, very frustrating! Some of the stuff can be removed with our restoration software, and some just can't. We can do overall dirt and scratch removal, and when there's missing frames, we can digitally splice the frame before and the frame after and combine it. So there was some damage



A myriad of animals

that we were able to fix, and some stuff that we just weren't able to fix. In some spots, we had to actually use the picture elements from Scriver's 16, mostly when the others were missing frames. You'll notice it when you see the DVD; you'll say, "Oh, that's softer, it must be from the 16"—but it was either do that, or not have those frames at all. Not one of the elements had a lot of picture information so there's not a lot of detail in the blacks, but I definitely think that what we've put together is better than anything that's been out there.

The big thing was, when we were doing our side-by-side comparison, we realized the running times didn't match, and that was because we found in the nitrate some dialogue that was cut from Universal's prints—lines that have never been heard before on video. So now we have an uncut print, which is pretty cool.

Condition-wise, have you ever run into this much trouble before with—

Gosh, yes.

With a Hollywood movie?

Oh, with a Hollywood movie. Not that I'm aware of. We've had this trouble with some foreign-language films, but not with a studio film, no. It was surprising. This film was so problematic: It was censored so many times, and cut to pieces in different ways, that I'm surprised this much material still survives. It IS 80 years old [laughs].

Has Criterion been pleased with the results of releasing horror sci-fi oldies?

Oh, yes, definitely. We've released a handful of them—*Carnival of Souls*, *The Blob*, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, *Equinox*, *Fiend Without a Face*, *Eyes Without a Face* and some others—and we have a lot of fun with them, and I think that the audiences really appreciate it. We always like to do jump, so when an *Island of Lost Souls* comes around, we kinda jump at the opportunity.

Beyond Greg Mank's commentary, what can you reveal about the various extras?

We did a video conversation with [director] John Landis [makeup artist] Rick Baker and [Monster Kid ei supreme] Bob Burns, who talked about how much they love the movie. Rick also talks about *Lost Souls'* makeup effects, how wonderful and weird and strange they are. It's kind of an "appreciation piece" with the three of them sitting together, and they're very funny and you can tell they've been friends forever and they babble about it and it's really fun. I did the interview, out in California. On that same trip, I also interviewed [fright film historian] David Skat, who talks about H.G. Wells and the Victorian era, and why all these stories from the Victorian era were being adapted into horror films in the 1930s. I also went to Montreal during *Fantasia* Fest and interviewed Richard Stanley, the writer and the original director of the 1996 *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. He has a unique relationship to the material in that he first read the book when he was 13 and that's when he got the idea that he wanted to make a movie out of it someday. He talks about the themes in Wells' novel and how they kinda work into his theories about things. He also talks about his experience when he started making his *Dr. Moreau* movie and was fired two days in—and how he then came back in makeup as one of the beast people, to secretly watch everybody! He was a pretty intense and really smart guy. That might be the first bit of bonus material I watch when I get the disc.

It's really cool when he talks about the ideas that he had for his script, and how [as the director] he would have adapted the material. I don't necessarily get the feeling that he's the biggest fan of *Island of Lost Souls* but he was... slightly complimentary to it [laughs]. He thinks that there has never been a good version made. I disagree with him, but he's so ensconced in the

material that's there probably not changing my mind. Have you seen all three versions?

I have never seen the 1977 AIP version, but I want to, after seeing the photos. It looks completely ridiculous [laughs].

And how do you feel about *Island of Lost Souls*?

I think it's absolutely amazing—so creepy and so atmospheric and so memorable in so many ways. The other thing I want to mention extra-wide is the new interviews with the band Devo's founding members Gerald Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh, who were very, very influenced by the film, not only in naming their first album *We Are Not Men? We Are Devo!*, but in their theories of de-evolution. When they were forming Devo, a lot of the philosophies came from things in this film, so they talk about that extensively. Mark was interviewed in L.A. and Gerry was interviewed here in New York. We also, just the other day, secured the rights to put on the DVD their first video, a ten-minute film from 1976 that has "Jocko Homo," the song where they say, "Are we not men? We are Devo." So overall I think we got a pretty wide range of opinions from all our interviewees, and you can kind of see how the film and the source material influenced people in different ways.

I'm sure they were all anxious to participate.

Oh, they were! When fans found out we were releasing *Island of Lost Souls*, they came crawling out of the woodwork all at once, looking to contribute, which was great for me. But it's also a lot of pressure when I know that a movie is one that people are really looking forward to, and in this case for such a long time. I hope you guys like it! What can horror-film oldies fans do to get "the Criterion treatment" for some of our other not-on-DVD favorites? Buy *Island of Lost Souls*?

Exactly [laughs]—it's all in the numbers. That, and keep bugging us!



Devo's classic debut album from 1978.



Devo poses in a Warner Bros. publicity still for their debut album.

Q: *Are We Not Men?* A: *We Are Devo!*

ARE WE NOT MAN?:

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUDIO COMMENTARY

GREGG: When did you first become aware of *Island of Lost Souls*?

SCREEM MANK: Summer 1966. I was 15, and my cousin David and I went into downtown Baltimore where one of the stores had Daniel Blum's book *An Illustrated History of the Talkies*. At the time my favorite movies were the classic Universal Horrors and John Ford Westerns, and the book had great shots of Karloff's Monster and Lugosi's Dracula, and a shot of the cast of *Stagecoach*, plus much more, of course. So I forked out the five bucks and bought it. The funny thing was, when we got back to David's house, I looked at it more thoroughly, and the 1937 section opened with a shot of a bare-breasted Hedy Lamarr from *Ecstasy*. I remember thinking, "Wow! I just bought pornography!"

Anyway, there was a small still from *Island of Lost Souls*, showing "Panther Woman" Kathleen Burke with Richard Arlen and some beast men. Something about the shot fascinated me—Kathleen Burke was very alluring, in a strange sort of way—and from that point on, I was hell-bent on seeing it.

When did you?

Shortly afterwards. Channel 11 in Baltimore used to show the old Paramount movies weeknights after *The Tonight Show*. I was impressed properly. Of course, at 15, I didn't know what sadism-masochism was, so I couldn't fully appreciate Charles Laughton's very kinky portrayal of Dr. Moreau. I didn't know what bestiality was, so I missed the full impact of Laughton wanting to mate Kathleen Burke's Panther Woman with Richard Arlen's human male. I didn't know Bela Lugosi was bankrupt late in 1932, so I wondered why he took the relatively small (but very juicy) *Sayer of the Law* role. And so on.

When you recently re-watched it for the commentary, what particularly impressed you?

The film's ferocity and perversity. It's interesting how much more sexy and violent the early Paramount horror films were than the Universal horror classics. Paramount's 1931 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has Miriam Hopkins perform her famous striptease down to her garter, later, when Fredric March's Hyde kills her, it's implied he's torn out her heart. *Murders in the Zoo*, produced by Paramount right after *Island of Lost Souls*, opens with Lionel Atwill sewing a man's mouth shut for having kissed his wife [played by Kathleen Burke, *Lost Souls*' Panther Woman]. Lister Atwill throws Burke into an alligator pool!

Of course, the Universals, such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, far surpassed the Paramount films at the box office—Depression audiences preferred the more "fairy tale" style of Universal, so you can argue that Paramount went too far. Anyway, for sheer sensationalism, *Island of Lost Souls* has them all beat. You only have to look at the international censorship firestorm, covered extensively in the commentary, to see how the film genuinely shocked the world in 1933.

Do you think it's more "sensational" than *Dr. Browning's Snake*?

Yeah *Snake* has some great moments, but I don't think it ever fully rises above the exploitation angle. It doesn't have a "virtuoso" star performance, like Laughton gives in *Island of Lost Souls*. (I love Olga Badanova as Cleopatra in *Snake*, but she ain't no virtuoso!) And Erle C. Kenton does a far slicker, smoother job of directing *Island of Lost Souls* than the rather clunky, hit-and-miss approach Ted Browning brings to *Snake*. The climaxes of both films are similar, of course, and both incredibly nightmarish, but again, I think *Island of Lost Souls* has the edge. Mark Verna puts it well in his book *Sin in Soft Focus*: He writes that *Island of Lost Souls* is "a not man's *Frank*."

What are some of the discoveries you made while doing research for your commentary?

There were some fascinating ones. Actually my research goes back years. In the 1990s, I interviewed Verna Hille, who was one of the "final four" contestants in the Panther Woman contest. Paramount had ballyhooed a national search to find a girl to play the Panther Woman in *Island of Lost Souls* and Verna had been the finalist from Detroit, who came to Hollywood for the final selection—she was the "blonde" finalist.

Verna was terrific. I visited her at her apartment in New York. She was 80 or so, but still rather glamorous, with a very flirtatious way of talking and moving—she sort of "slinked." She must have been quite the sex baby, as the expression went, back in 1932! Anyway, Verna loved reminiscing about the Panther Woman contest and had great stories. She also had some pictures of the final four—Lona Andre, Gail Patrick, Kathleen Burke and herself—all after they had just arrived in L.A. before Paramount glamorized them. They all looked like Little Mary Sunshine—like convent school girls some evil producer had shanghaied to Hollywood to transform into Panther Women!

More recently, while preparing the commentary, I managed to get some very informative material from the Paramount Collection at the Motion Picture Academy [in Beverly Hills]. Kristine Krueger is curator there for the National Film Service, and she's always fantastically knowledgeable and helpful. She provided plenty of facts and figures from the Paramount Collection, great nuts-and-bolts production data. And the *Island of Lost Souls* censorship story, which Kristine also provided—pages and pages of it—is a whole saga in itself! By the way, Joseph Breen, the Production Code censor, really went ballistic about the film. He went on record that it was "blasphemous," "obnoxious," and shouldn't be shown before mixed audiences!

The Criterion release is complete?

Absolutely. In fact, that's a funny story too. There's a terrific guy at USC's Performing Arts Library, Ned Comstock. The man's a saint when it comes to helping film researchers and finding rare material. When I asked for his help on the *Lost Souls* commentary, among the many things Ned sent was the dialogue continuity. This was the complete description on paper of the film, scenes and dialogue.

Well, I tel Susan about these 17 missing words—and within days, Criterion tracks down a nitrate print at UCLA with the missing dialogue! So the Criterion version has absolutely everything that was in *Island of Lost Souls* when Paramount originally released it in December of 1932.



Kathleen Burke as the Panther Woman.

You mentioned Bela Lugosi coming into the film under sad circumstances.

When shooting began, the role of the Sayer of the Law, according to the script, was not yet cast. Lugosi signed on for the part in October of 1932—the same month he fled for bankruptcy. Hard to believe Bela was bankrupt only a year and a half after *Dracula's* release, but sad to say, he was—and very desperate. He told the court his clothes and some equity in furniture were his only assets, and he signed on for *Lost Souls* at a shockingly small fee. I'd rather keep the specifics for the commentary, of course, but as a Lugosi fan, I was appalled when I saw Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls* salary sheet.

Of course, Bela nevertheless gave it everything he had. His marie in the climax as he leads the charge against Laughton is amazing.

What do you think of Eric C. Kenton's direction?
I admire it greatly. Many years ago, when I wrote my book *It's Alive! The Classic Cinema Sage of Frankenstein*, I was a bit dismissive of Kenton, who directed *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. I thought him a very fine craftsman—and of course, by that time in the Universal series, that's really what was required. But he really threw himself into *Island of Lost Souls*—he even dressed as Moreau part of the time, complete with whip!—and the film has the sparks of a clearly obsessed director. He had the help of a brilliant cinematographer, Karl Struss, and they admired each other and worked very well together.

Watching Kathleen Burke, who'd never been in a film before, you can tell the director is taking time with her, carefully guiding her Panther Woman performance. Burke comes off very well in *Island of Lost Souls*—she's moving and, remarkably, ultimately tragic in a role that might have been a total hoot. This is a credit to the director as well as the actress. Kathleen Burke's boyfriend apparently thought Kenton was taking too much time with her on the set, observing her too closely... but that's another commentary story.

No matter how much I think I know about a movie, as soon as I'm asked to do a commentary, I'm like, "Homina homina—do I know enough to get away with it?"

Oh yeah. And then it becomes almost a sacred mission to find as much new information as possible. Often you find so much it won't all fit in the commentary's running time, and then it becomes a question of what to include and what to leave out. On most of the commentaries I've done, I've ended up with several pages of "extras" that I wish I could have included. I try to squeeze in as much as possible so I sometimes speak rapidly. I've played Prof. Harold Hill in *The Music Man* a number of times and sometimes on the commentaries, trying to pack in everything. I feel like I'm doing "Ys Got Trouble."

When you listen to a commentary, which do you enjoy more, the speaker's "take" on the picture, or hearing about the nuts and bolts of making it?

Definitely nuts and bolts. Fans can fight and debate about the merits of a film director, actor, etc., but facts are facts, and especially intriguing if they come from the studio records. It's amazing how much great material is out there if you know where to dig for the treasure. It's more critical at this point in film history, I think, to gather and report as much data as possible on the vintage films than it is for a commentator to indulge in personal opinions and stroll down his or her own memory lane. Of course, some of this can add to the commentary's entertainment value, but a little of it goes a long way.

The maddening thing about movies like *Lost Souls* is that most of the key people—the director, the writer, the d.p., the makeup man, most of the stars—were alive right into the 1970s and '80s. But Squirrelly Early Fandom's self-proclaimed "experts" were content to let all these people die without lifting a finger to find out one thing from any of them concerning *Lost Souls*—or concerning 99 percent of our other favorites.

It's absolutely amazing, because for me, the real fun, the real excitement, the real adventure was always finding these people, interviewing them and hearing their personal stories. I have so many vivid memories: Mae Clarke dramatically acting out for me the Frankenstein Monster's discovery of light... Elsa Lanchester teaching me how to hiss like the Bride of Frankenstein... Hope Lugosi, Bela's widow, giving a wonderfully comic account of the night she and Bela visited all his former mansions in Hollywood, waking up the current owners... so many others. To me, this is what it's really about.

Meanwhile, right up through about 1980, grown fans—even LaLaLand fans who had these old-timers living next door to 'em!—most of them were content to write synopses and swap lists of movies with giant spiders, while the whole history of the movies they claimed to be experts on was dying all around 'em. They call themselves First Fandom; I call 'em Worst Fandom!

Why people years ago didn't pursue the same thing, especially people who had easy access, has always mystified me. Of course, sometimes I've been glad they didn't, because the stories were still fresh when I got to them! But yes, it's sad to consider all the terrific history lost because nobody bothered when, as you say, so many folks were still alive—and had so much to tell.

I consider your *It's Alive* the book that more or less started the Monster Kid Revolution—OUT with these lazy astards who called themselves experts because they could write synopses and/or make puns, IN with the shoe-leather journalists. Why did it take so long for this to happen?

I appreciate the nice words. It's a very good question why it took time for this to happen. I wonder why too. It's funny... I was hooked on horror films since 1957, when I was six and *Frankenstein* first came on TV. For years I had a recurrent dream, maybe once or twice a year, that it was my birthday or Christmas, and I got a book that was all about Universal's *Frankenstein* series and another book that was all about the films Karloff and Lugosi made together. For years I hoped the books would happen, but they never did—so I wrote them myself!

Where was the commentary recorded? Did it all go smoothly?

It was recorded in June 2011 at the Gramercy Post Studio in New York City. When I first got there, I mistakenly entered a room where a bunch of actors had gathered to audition for a radio commercial. I think they figured I was auditioning too, so they all looked up at me with that "Get the hell out of here!" look that actors automatically give each other when they gather for an audition. Criterion producer Susan Aronson rescued me, got me safely into Criterion's studio and all went fine.

Do you enjoy doing audio commentaries?

I love it—although, it's very obsessive work. This is the ninth one I've done, and I try to make everything well-timed and scene-specific, so I watch the film many times, over and over, and eventually it becomes almost a personal emotional connection.

A few years ago I did the commentary for *The Walking Dead*—the 1936 Karloff film, not the recent TV series—and watched Karloff's great death scene time and again, and instead of getting jaded, I actually became more moved every time I watched it. So, during the recording in L.A., I'm taking at the end of the film, and Karloff's dying, and the sad music "Kammekl Ostraw" is playing mournfully on the soundtrack, and the heroine, Marguerite Churchill, is crying—and I realize that my voice is cracking! The sound engineer, a very nice woman, said it was effective that way, so we didn't do it over, but it hit me how much the film had really gotten under my skin.

Well... with *Island of Lost Souls*, after weeks of watching sado-maso mad doctor Charles Laughton cracking his whip, and a hair-covered Bela Lugosi drowning, "Are we not men?" and Kathleen Burke crying because her "stubborn beast flesh" is creeping back, and the beast man wincing against Laughton while he laughs and screams in perverse joy, I was ready for institutionalization. My wife Barbara watched it with me several times the last week I was preparing it, so after the recording, we both needed a break in the "clean world."

What's your most vivid image from *Island of Lost Souls*?

It has to be the climax, Lugosi's Sayer of the Law leading the final stampede against Laughton's whip-cracking Moreau, and that one anonymous beast man comes charging in, and the camera pans down—and you see he has a hoof. Moreau made him from a goat, obviously, but he's especially creepy, since the Devil traditionally has hoofs too. Anyway, that goat beast man is so damn jolly—he has this great big smile on his face, as if he somehow knows that, almost 80 years later, he'll still be freaking people out. And on DVD and Blu-ray no less!

Special thanks to Ted Bohus for supplying the animal photos.



Iconic photo of Bela Lugosi as the Sayer of the Law.

IT'S STILL ALIVE! FRANKENSTEIN 80TH ANNIVERSARY LEGACY

By Scott Essman



Digital illustration by Rick Baker.



"It's alive . . . It's alive!"



Jack Pierce creates a monster.

"It's alive!" might be one of the most famous lines in cinema history, but it was the totality of the film from which it came that made the entire *Frankenstein* experience one of the most powerful of its time and even now, 80 years onward, resonates as an all-time classic. Based on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's internationally sensational 1818 novel, the film, significantly altered from the specifics of the book, became a landmark in many of its individual aspects: direction, production design, cinematography, makeup, costume design, and of course, the ensemble performance by its stable of actors. In addition to his notable co-stars, British expatriate Boris Karloff gave such an outstanding performance as the Frankenstein Monster, which was so iconic in appearance, body language, mannerisms, intonations, and screen presence, audiences would forever identify him—somewhat unfairly—solely by the title of this breakthrough horror film.

With *Dracula* debuting in February of 1931, it would only be a matter of time before Universal Pictures tried to reproduce its tremendous success. The result was a production of *Frankenstein*, which would be initiated mid-year and be released by year's end, presided over by studio head of production Carl Laemmle, Jr. With Béla Lugosi and director Robert Florey out after test footage that depressed the studio, with the makeup reminding viewers of *Der Golem*, nascent director James Whale gained the assignment. Interesting that Whale was new to horror, he directed the films *Journey's End* in 1930 and *Waterloo Bridge* in 1931, the latter for Universal, but no prior genre films. However, his meticulous approach and attention to detail would give *Frankenstein* a combination of elegance, fear, and pathos. Famously, Whale went on to direct *The Old Dark House*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Bride of Frankenstein* in the genre, all additional outstanding notches in his directing belt and superb additions to Universal's horror canon.

Shortly after coming aboard the film, Whale began casting about for a suitable actor to play the Monster. According to legend, he spotted a little-known supporting actor in the Universal commissary during lunch, suggesting that his face had "possibilities." Of course, that performer, then already into his early 40s, would be Boris Karloff. Soon, Whale would bring many other Britons into the cast with whom he had worked on various productions, including Colin Clive, Edward Van Sloan and Dwight Frye in key roles, and Frederick Kerr in a key supporting part as Henry's father.

Taking the essence of Shelley's novel, John L. Balderston adapted the book into a screenplay that Whale would visually manifest. The decision was to make the creature a silent hulk with the story focusing on Henry Frankenstein (Clive) and his obsession with animating dead tissue, a project so encompassing, it interrupts his pending marriage to Elizabeth (Mae Clarke). One of the few questions which remained for the production was what Karloff as the monster would look like on screen.

Into pre-production of *Frankenstein* in spring and early summer of 1930, Whale immediately put Jack Pierce to work to establish the makeup for Karloff's monstrous character. What they came up with together, working after-hours—three hours per day—for three weeks in Pierce's makeup bungalow on the Universal lot, is one of the most recognizable icons in cinema history.

Still lauded by numerous makeup and effects artists who have come since, the original *Frankenstein* remains a benchmark for movie makeup. "I believe this character has been the greatest of all monsters portrayed in motion pictures," said Jack Pierce in 1962. Pierce described in great detail what inspired his classic character conception after he read the novel—given to him by "Junior Laemmle"—three times in early 1930. "I did research work for six months before I created the Frankenstein monster," he said. "It was a lot of hard work, trying to find ways and means, what can you do? Frankenstein wasn't a doctor, he was a scientist, so . . . he had to take the head and open it, . . . and he took wires to rivet the head. I had to [add] the electrical outlets to connect electricity in here on the neck. I made it out of clay and put hair on it and took it in to Junior Laemmle's office. He said, 'you mean to tell me you can do this on a human being?' I said, 'positively.' He said, 'all right, we will go the limit.'"



The monster loses a friend.

Carl Lumbly Presents
BORIS KARLOFF
MAE CLARKE
dans le film de JAMES WHALE
Distribué par COLUMBIA PICTURES

avec
JOHN BOLES
et
COLIN CLIVE
Requiescent de JAMES WHALE



Fantastic French poster for Frankenstein (1931).



Just another day at the office.

For Pierce's first Frankenstein film—there were six eventual sequels for which he would create a different turn on the monster in each—he described the process of assembling the character. "The wig was made with a cotton roll on the top to get the fairness and the circle that protrudes out from the head," he revealed. "Instead of giving [the character] a round head, you get a different edge around the sides. The entire head was built new every day. The large gear on the top of the forehead, that's where you open the head to put the brains in there, the artificial brain. It took three hours each morning. Then the electrodes were put on his neck. The makeup was sky gray, originated by me through Max Factor's organization."

Graciously, Pierce reserved his final comments regarding James Whale's landmark Frankenstein for his friend and longtime colleague, Boris Karloff. "For Boris, the coat was cut down so the length of arms and the fingers would look long," he explained. "Everything was in black to give him the height. Also, I padded him to look eight feet tall. I didn't really teach him how to walk. Boris and I would talk, but the man is, I think, the greatest of them all as far as playing these parts."

With the makeup and script in place, costume designer Vera West and production designer Charles D. Hall set about creating the world of the film. Set in the 1800s, West and Hall's concepts were notably Germanic in their realization. Surely, West's contributions including the costumes for the monster and Dwight Frye's Fritz would become legendary and copied by countless succeeding projects. Others likely contributed to the monster costume, including Pierce himself, who, as noted, recommended certain amounts of padding and length for Karloff's boots, coat, and pants. Hall's gothic sets, especially inside the castle and famous laboratory, perfectly captured the feel of the Shelley novel while adding their own dimensionality. Certainly, Kenneth Strickfaden's functioning electrical equipment famously enhanced the laboratory set. The backlot exterior standing set, called the "Court of Miracles" and used in many Universal productions, would be utilized for village exteriors, but, aside for Malibu as a location for the lake scene with little Maria and a cliffside scene where the monster carries Henry towards the climactic windmill sequence, most of Frankenstein—even the exteriors—was shot inside freshly constructed sound stages on the Universal lot. Additional model shots of the castle and windmill were brought to life with the magic of visual effects supervisor John P. Fulton, another Universal stalwart on the run of horror films that would continue until 1945.

Throughout the film, the stark black-and-white cinematography is a testament to Whale's classy direction and even more so to Arthur Edson's talents. The entirety of the film is shot in gothic tones, and Edson perfectly captures the high contrast in the production design, costumes, and facial features of the actors in every scene. Even the backdrops for the exteriors shot on stage and the darkened palette of the practical exteriors are painted with Edson's deep blacks and harsh whites. This expressionistic approach informs the film with not only a 19th century feeling but also a horror undercurrent that began in Universal films including *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and *Dracula* (1931) and continued into the mid-1940s in most of their slate in the classic monster cycle.

Another revolutionary aspect of Frankenstein is its picture editing, which had only recently blossomed at the dawn of the sound era of filmmaking. Before the advent of sound divided time and forever changed the production of feature films, a young editor named Clarence Kolster had been regularly cutting silent pictures in Hollywood. In 1922, Kolster edited *Rags to Riches* when he was just 27, and he worked regularly before joining Universal to edit James Whale's *Waterloo Bridge* in 1931. It was his next assignment, however, that would immortalize Kolster's place in movie history.

In possibly the most distinguished piece of cutting in all of horror movie history, Kolster reveals Karloff's monster to us in a series of three quick, successively tighter close-ups. Due in part to Whale's stylish direction, Karloff's expressive face, and Pierce's pioneering makeup design, the first glimpse of the Karloff monster as presented by Kolster is as timeless an image as any in cinema.

Many other sequences in Frankenstein have now become classic screen moments—witness the first "creation" sequence, often repeated and imitated in countless sequels and updates, but never measuring up to Kolster's version. The same is true for his dynamic cutting in the scenes where the monster confronts, first, the little girl, Maria, by the lake, and later, his maker's bride on her wedding day. After the exploits of Frankenstein, Kolster went on to edit Whale's *The Old Dark House* in 1932 before embarking on an active career as a picture editor in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, Kolster was less active and retired in 1958; he passed away 14 years later. Yet in his 36 years as an editor, Kolster's impact, particularly with Frankenstein, is surely cemented in American popular culture.

In hindsight, the first part of the film is a slow buildup to the creation sequence with a pall of dread spread throughout the introductory scenes. We realize that Henry and Elizabeth's wedding has been put off for some unknown reason and that Henry's father is suspicious of his activities in his remote castle. Meanwhile, we learn that Moritz longs for Elizabeth and is more than a friend—he represents the unspoken third side of a love triangle and wishes to court Elizabeth in Henry's long absence. This seed planted early in the film comes to fruition later during Henry and Elizabeth's wedding day when a despondent Henry, pursuing the monster, tells Moritz that regardless of what happens to himself, he leaves Elizabeth in Moritz' care, revealing that he understands Moritz' desires and is ready to give his fiancée to him.

All of this expository material is intercut with Henry, who is clearly obsessed with his experiments, to the point of grave robbery and sending his assistant, Fritz, to steal a human brain when the man that they dig up has a useless brain after a hanging. Though without music, all of the early material in the film slowly and menacingly builds a vision of Henry as the driven loner, uncaring about a wealthy life and marriage waiting for him at home. Clearly unhappy, he pines to create artificial life in his own confines rather than return to his "house of Frankenstein" with his renowned statesman father, his mentoring teacher (Dr. Waldman—Van Sloan), and his beautiful wife-to-be, and create natural life, a child, as he is expected to. Subtly, this is a statement on not only Henry's singular portrait of his own desires, but his lack of interest in a traditional lifestyle, not surprising considering Whale's openly gay status at the time.

With the arrival of the famous creation sequence, we only see Karloff's lifeless frame on the operating table amidst the overstuffed lab full of equipment, which represents a nightmarish manifestation of Henry's pursuits as a man of science. When Moritz, Elizabeth and Waldman finally arrive at the hideous castle, a ferocious lightning storm ushers in the unforgettable sequence, with Henry claiming to have discovered a previously untapped "great ray" which first brought life to earth. When Moritz calls him crazy, that only furthers Henry's will to prove to himself and the others that his hypothesis of this ray's existence—and his ability to animate dead tissue—is possible.

But nothing prepares the viewer for the aftermath of the sight of Karloff's dead body hoisted to the nether regions of the lab to be exposed, through the lightning, to that ray, so that when he is brought down, with the slight movement of a hand, it is, in fact, alive. With the storm still going on, the words, cleverly intercut by the sound editor, "Look—it's moving," followed by "It's alive!" are among cinema's most memorable. In his exaltation, Henry, looking skyward to a deity that he believes he has usurped, is grabbed by Waldman and Moritz, who exclaims, "Henry! In the name of God!" only to have Henry retort, "In the name of God? Now I know what it feels like to BE God!" That line, cut out of early Hays Code prints and only restored in later versions, ends one of the movie's best scenes and surely the most landmark scene in any horror film to date.

Succeeding scenes include the belief by Henry's father that his son is engaged in an affair, which is holding up the marriage to Elizabeth. Along with those, Waldman scolds Henry that he has tampered with nature and has created a beast that he will be unable to control, admonishing him that the brain Henry stole from Waldman's lab was a criminal brain. Dismissive, Henry notes that the creature must be given a chance, after which Karloff finally emerges from the darkness. Those three shots of the monster in lighter and lighter close-ups finally reveal the nature of the creature, a perfect amalgam of man and beast and horror's most all-time recognizable character. But the sympathy Karloff generates for the character has still not been matched by horror characters who have come since. Huge, lumbering and innocent, he grabs for the skylight which he is seeing for the first time. After the light is doused, Karloff's empty handed pleas to Henry for comfort are at the same time a brilliant piece of acting and direction, perfectly capturing how much like an unforned infant the creature really is, just after its birth. Far from a "monster," he is only driven to violence when Henry and Fritz see him and torments him with a torch. Finally subdued by Waldman, Fritz and Henry, the monster has been driven into violence just after his inception, prompting Waldman to cry out, "Shoot it—it's a monster." And with that, Henry's promises, dreams, and hopes for his work are shattered as soon as they came to fruition.

Now in chains in the cellar of the castle, the creature has been reduced to a miscreant, a tortured soul whose very existence is called into question, with no hope of being accepted and no possibility of assimilation into the society where he was born. He kills Fritz, who, also a wretch, had no understanding of or deference to the creature. Waldman finally notes that Henry must destroy his creation lest it kill again, and he is subdued with a strong sedative, with Henry lastly agreeing that aborting his creation is his only solution.

When Henry's father finally demands to see his son, arriving at the castle in haste and displeasure, Henry collapses and is returned home, with Waldman promising to painlessly destroy Henry's misbegotten creation. Of course, in a predictable but still suspenseful scene, the monster has adapted and becomes resistant to the sedatives, and kills Waldman during the dissection process, which allows him to escape the castle.

Monster meets maker.



Dwight
Frye as
Fritz.

The monster awaits his prey.

Sharing flowers with Maria.



Now free, the monster might have gone on another rampage, but he encounters little Maria by the lake, setting up one of Frankenstein's most touching and heartbreaking scenes. At first shocked by the sight of the monster, Maria (Marilyn Harris) decides to invite him to play, prompting a smile on the face of the monster, the only time he offers any semblance of happiness. Entranced by playing with Maria's flowers, the monster unthinkably but unknowingly causes her drowning death which he realizes too late in their game. Watching the monster clutch at the water trying to save her, then despairingly flee into the hills, gives Frankenstein its most tragic moment.

Frankenstein's elaborate exterior wedding preparation sequence, perhaps an homage to the Laemmle's origins in early 20th century Germany, gives way to another touchstone moment in the film when the monster invades the bride's quarters and attacks her—though off camera after a haunting series of buildup shots. With the proverbial son going after his father via his intended lover, a father who has not only shirked his parental duties but has conspired to kill his own spiritual offspring, Frankenstein's message of revenge is driven home. It is only by implication that the monster's attack on Elizabeth is explicit, but Henry knows that his relations with his virginal fiancé, now spoiled, cannot move forward until he pursues and desists with this living being, who he thought to be dead, but who is in actuality his own son, symbolically, from "another marriage," but, in point, not part of Elizabeth's personage.

One of the film's most horrific scenes—of note, there is no blood in the picture—is the sight of little Maria's father carrying her lifeless body to the office of the burgomaster, leading the villagers, armed with torches, clubs, and pitchforks, on a countryside hunt for the monster. Of note, the image of just such a mob has been copied and referenced in countless horror and comedy films succeeding. When Henry finally confronts the monster face-to-face on a cliff, the creature only wishes to manhandle his father and carry him off towards the windmill. Why he does so, cornering himself with the villagers closing in, was never explained. However, it set up a wonderful image of the monster and Henry viewing each other between the spokes of a windmill gear. It is a dialogue-free scene that silently communicates the monster's resentment of Henry's bringing him to life in the first place, Henry's pathetic disappointment with how his creation has become a hunted animal, and Henry's newfound desire to finally put his creation to rest so that he can return to Elizabeth and consummate their relationship.

With the windmill's burning after the monster flings a helpless Henry onto a windmill blade, ostensibly killing him, the creature is ultimately burned alive, trapped under a beam, his desperate screams crying out into the night with not one sympathetic ear in range. Many analogies and parallels to the lynching can be drawn, but it suffices that the creature is widely hated, universally blamed for the deaths of Waldman and Maria, and has seemingly also done in his lone potential supporter in Henry, his figurative creator. The final model shots of the devastated windmill might have been Frankenstein's final images. However, an epilogue shot in Henry's bedroom at the Frankenstein compound, with Henry out of focus in the background (likely not even Colin Clive in that scene), only serves to tack on a happy ending. Henry's father raises a toast to a son of the "house of Frankenstein" with Elizabeth apparently by his side in final marital bliss. And with that, the bizarre epilogue aside, one of cinema's great ventures comes to a close after 70 glorious balanced impeccable minutes.



Maria's lifeless body is carried through the town by her father.

Though it took Universal four years to bring the long-rumored sequel to Frankenstein to the screen, the second film in the cycle, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, introduced one striking new creation to Mary Shelley's world. In addition to a new frontally-burned version of the monster, again Karloff, Pierce brought a "bride" to the screen in the form of actress Elsa Lanchester. Only appearing at the end of the film, and then for only a few minutes, the image of Lanchester as the Bride of Frankenstein remains as iconic as the 1931 visage of the first Monster. With augmented lips, eyebrows, and eyelashes, plus her amazing shock of hair—ostensibly put up in a wire cage with asymmetrical electric wigs of gray—the Bride, with her birdlike motions and subtle chin scars, manages to simultaneously attract and repel. Both beautiful and horrifying, Lanchester's brief, quirky appearance on film as the Bride is one of Jack Pierce's simplest but most clever manifestations.

Although Whale had left the studio and Colin Clive had passed away in 1937, Pierce and Karloff re-teamed to create a third modified version of the Monster and a new character—Ygor with Bela Lugosi—for *Son of Frankenstein*. The Monster would make appearances with new actors Lon Chaney, in *Ghost of Frankenstein*, Bela Lugosi, in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, and Glenn Strange, in both *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. The last film in the classic horror cycle, though arguably not actually part of the group of films which featured the same team of craftspeople, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, was released in 1948, which also featured Strange in the title role.

Without question, the character that legions of fans will physically imitate if asked to portray the Frankenstein Monster is often the hulking, silent, arm-extended Strange version. But undoubtedly, it is Karloff's startling performance in the first 1931 film and to some extent his dialogue-riddled portrayal in *Bride*, which emerge as the standout classic horror roles for the character. Though Karloff would go on to excellence in many films, stage work, and voice work over the next four decades, it was Frankenstein that launched his starring career and stamped a classic character in the memories of the millions of horror fans who have come since.

In retrospect, Boris Karloff, along with Bela Lugosi, became instantaneous movie royalty in one magical year, now 80 years ago. And surely, both men, European émigrés, gave America its greatest two horror characters of the 20th century and likely for eternity, and, in Frankenstein, one of its greatest films.



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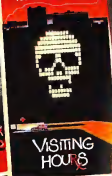
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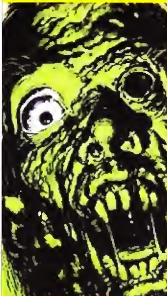
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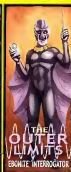
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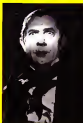
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10 ESSENTIAL MONSTER TOYS FROM THE 1960s

BY ANTHONY TAYLOR

In 1958, a "perfect storm" of monster movie fandom was brewing in America. Before it dissipated in the late 1960s, hundreds of thousands of young boys and girls around the world would be swept up in its path.

The first issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine hit newsstands in 1958, courtesy of editor Forrest J Ackerman and Warren Publishing. This was the first professional genre-specific magazine devoted to horror films and derizens thereof. At around the same time, Universal Pictures released their classic monster movies from the 1930s and '40s to television, sparking the creation of hosted weekly "spook shows" on local television affiliates around the country. For the first time in history, monster lovers could watch *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Wolf Man* and other genre staples in the comfort of their own homes. The hosted horror shows created a fan base ready to buy a magazine like *Famous Monsters*; how otherwise was one to feed the monster obsession? There were no other outlets for viewing photos or reading behind-the-scenes information about the films at the time.

At the same time, horror movies were experiencing a renaissance in theaters. Studios like Hammer in England and American International Pictures released a new breed of colorful and bloody films, aimed directly at the teenage audience that was already buying the magazine and watching the black-and-white classics on television.

James Warren, publisher of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, knew he had a winner with the magazine, reaching a large and lucrative demographic readership. Unable to convince advertisers of the fact, he decided to open a mail order company to take advantage of the enormous amount of young people with disposable cash looking for monster related merchandise. The Captain Company was formed to lighten kids' pockets of their allowances in exchange for the horror related goodies they craved. Multiple catalog pages ran as advertisements in the back pages of *Famous Monsters*, generating high volumes of sales.

In 1961, the Aurora Plastics Corporation threw logs on the kindling of the monster fandom bonfire with the release of their plastic model kit of Boris Karloff as the Frankenstein monster. The kit led to a full line of monster models from the company.

By 1963, there were monster toys and merchandise available from dozens of manufacturers, and Warren's Captain Company was raking in cash by the bag-load, catering to the needs of fans. Look-alike magazines began to hit newsstands to feed the seemingly insatiable mob appetite for more photos and stories. Monster toys, masks, household goods, and other items could be found in every dime, drug, and department store in every town in the country. From this embarrassment of riches, it could be difficult to choose just the right toy to spend one's allowance on; value for the hard-earned money was paramount, as was keeping up with (and surpassing) the collections of friends.

In no particular order, here is my list of ten essential monster toys from the 1960s. (Note that models, masks, posters, and other collectibles are not included in this list.)

MARK MONSTER FIGURINES

No monster collection is complete without this set of six hard plastic figures from the Louis Marx Company. Standing approximately five to seven inches tall, the series consisted of Frankenstein, The Wolf Man, The Mummy, Creature from the Black Lagoon, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and The Phantom of the Opera. Sculpted by either Bill Lemon (Aurora's more prolific monster model kit creator, though he denied that these are his work—did he forget?) or Marx stalwart Joe Ferriol, the figures were originally issued in teal blue and bright orange plastic and retailed for ten cents each. A price increase to nearly double, nineteen cents, occurred in the mid-60s, as did a bagged release of the full set with a set of bottled paints for coloring the gruesome toys. For years the figures could be found at every Kresge's, Woolworth's, or other neighborhood five-and-dime store in a cardboard bin with the other popular Marx releases. Other plastic colors followed as the set was resued over the years, even after the company went out of business and sold its molds. While original releases can cost upwards of fifty dollars, the resues are available reasonably. A check of eBay shows a rainbow of Marx plastic monsters, including glow-in-the-dark, and silver gray figurines that are apparently still being produced in Mexico.



MULTIPLE TOYMAKERS' HORRORSCOPE MOVIE VIEWER

A fixture in the pages of Captain Company ads in *Famous Monsters* magazine for years, the Horrorscope was a toy that either very few kids ordered or it was so shoddily manufactured that few survive, making it very rare. The Horrorscope was a nine-inch-tall plastic, hand-cranked (nickelodeon style) viewer, into which a series of still photos were cranked around like an animation flipbook, creating motion. No batteries or bulbs were required, just a little elbow grease. There were four "movies" available for it, as evidenced by the box art: *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Wolf Man*, and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Each featured 128 flip-cards.



This is one of the most sought after monster toys of the decade, though it sold for only \$2.98 originally, a mint, sealed example went for more than \$3000 several years ago.

MATTEL HERMAN MUNSTER TALKING DOLL/HAND PUPPET

"I Love The Beesties!" That phrase makes this doll worth upwards of \$500, if you have one that professes its love of the Fab Four. Released in 1964 at the height of the musical group's British invasion popularity, Mattel was served a cease-and-desist order from the band's management and had to pull unsold dolls from store shelves and replace it with versions that didn't include the phrase. Almost certainly the company simply replaced the tiny record in the voice boxes, then repackaged and redistributed the dolls rather than destroying and remanufacturing them.

There are two versions of the Herman doll, one with yellowish paint and the other with green; the yellow version is worth more as well. The same vinyl head and hands were used to make a hand puppet version that spoke additional phrases, also in Munsters star Fred Gwynne's voice. On the market until sometime in 1966, the toys are fan favorites, and boxed examples are highly sought after by collectors of both Munsters and Beatles memorabilia.



HASBRO MONSTER MYSTERY GAMES

In 1963, Hasbro released board games based on Universal's *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Wolf Man*. Rushed into production in order to catch the wave of monster popularity that was cresting, the games featured little in the way of play value, and the moody, impressionistic art was not reflective of the illustrative, action-packed Aurora kits. The first set of games were produced in higher volume and sold fewer copies when originally released at a price of \$3.98, making them more plentiful today.

The following year, the company issued games based on *The Mummy*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, featuring the more popular style of art. Because the earlier games didn't meet management's sales expectations, the games were produced in lower numbers and sold out instantly, making them worth more in today's collector market. The art in these games were almost direct re-interpretations of the Aurora kits in pose and style. Nice examples of the first three games can run in the several hundreds of dollars, but the later games sell for much more—near mint examples can command over two thousand dollars!

THE ADDAMS FAMILY "THING" BANK

Created in 1964 by licensing and merchandising pioneer Robert J. Whiteman, The Thing bank has become an icon beyond the Addams Family and monster lovers and collectors. The battery-operated, plastic box-like bank features a disembodied hand that creeps out from under a mechanized lid to snatch any coin placed in its holder and then retracts, depositing the coin in its dark plastic belly.

Originally issued by Poynter Products in an illustrated, Addams Family branded box, the bank was reissued several times without any Addams Family tie-in, making it ubiquitous and perennially popular. It even appeared in an episode of Patrick McGowan's *The Prisoner* television series. Though it retailed for five dollars when issued in 1964, original versions in good condition with the box command upwards of \$125, reissues can be had for around \$20.00.



1964. There were four sizes of each puzzle: a frame tray puzzle, as well as small (60+ piece 10"x14"), medium (100+ piece 15"x20"), and large (100+ piece 17"x22"). The Mummy seems to have been released only in the first three sizes, as no examples of the largest have been found to my knowledge. Beyond that, there were also two versions of each of the four tray puzzles, both with and without a yellow border. There also seems to be a smaller three-piece bundle as well, for giving very small children nightmares at an early age!

Several other monsters show up in the illustrations as well as the featured creatures. A character on the table in the Frankenstein puzzle is "The Human Monster" from the film of the same name, and the Crimson Ghost has a cameo in The Mummy puzzle. Also guest starring in the Wolf Man puzzle is Cary Grant from the movie poster for *North by Northwest*, which was obviously used as reference for one of the figures.



MILTON BRADLEY MONSTER OLD MAID CARD GAME

Featuring characters from Universal, American International, and Hammer films, this card game was one of the most widely bought and played-with monster toys of the 1960s. The game includes large 3.5" x 6" cards, with photo images of the Bride of Frankenstein, Frankenstein, Wolf Man, The Werewolf, Teen-age Werewolf, The Creature, Dracula, Dracula's Daughter (actually Andrea Kelly from Hammer's *Brides of Dracula*), Hunchback of Notre Dame, Phantom of the Opera, and The Mummy. Each character is featured on four cards except for the Bride, who has only two, and Dracula's Daughter, who is featured on just one card—she's the old maid!

Though many of these were produced, it's still a bit difficult to find a complete set in near mint condition, expect to pay from \$60.00 and up for complete sets in decent shape.



AURORA MONSTER COPPERSMITH KITS

Looking for ways to further exploit the monster craze, Aurora created a series of monster related copper burishing kits based on their popular monster models. The series consisted of Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, Wolf Man, and Creature from the Black Lagoon plaque kits. They were 8" x 8" and contained a plastic base-relief plaque, a sheet of copper to cover the plaque, and a set of burishing tools as well as various antiquing paints and brushes. The plaques were based directly on the box art for Aurora's popular monster models, and are highly sought after by collectors. Recent copper rubbings from them can be found online for \$20.00 to \$50.00, as can resin recasts of the plastic base-relief plaques. An original, unused set in good condition can command more than \$400, even higher for the Creature from the Black Lagoon kit.



MARX FRANKENSTEIN ROBOT AND WINDUP TOY

Once again, the Louis Marx Company stepped into the monster arena and provided the essential Frankenstein toy; a battery operated, remote-controlled walking robot of the monster! Constructed of lithographed tin with vinyl head and hands, the robot was released in 1963 and retailed originally for \$5.99, it was able to walk via tiny wheels on its feet, and also bowed, and raised and lowered his arms. The remote control was tethered by a power cord, and held the batteries. At the same time, Marx released a smaller, windup tin toy, walking version of the monster as well. Both were packaged in full color, illustrated boxes.

Both versions of the fellow are rare and highly prized, a battery-operated version in a good box can run a thousand dollars or more, and the smaller windup version can be as much as \$500 complete with box.

A very special thank you to Dan Roebuck, Tim E. Goodwin, Richard Olson, Dante Renta, and Bobby Beeman for their photographs and help in preparing this article.



SCREAM

FRIGHT FLICK PIC

HEADS UP!



We understood this one was difficult.
One winner knew this creature is from
Yokai Monsters: Spook Warfare.
Congrats to Miles Shephard!

They don't get much easier
than this issue's mystery pic!
It is taken from one of the
summer's most beloved
thrillers of all time.

Five lucky readers will win a
free DVD if they can guess the
name of the movie this pic is
taken from . . . ONE lucky
winner, who can name the
film and identify the
character whose decapitated
head is put on display here,
will win a grand prize box
filled with TEN new DVDs,
several horror books,
and other goodies! Best of
luck, mates . . . and here's to
swimmin' with bowlegged
women!



LAST ISSUE'S
MYSTERY PIC

Send your answer on a postcard to:
SCREAM FRIGHT FLICK PIC
41 MAYER ST.
WILKES BARRE, PA 18702

By Joe Wawrzyniak

THE 1980s

Ola Ray

Playboy info: Miss June 1980
Notable horror credits: Played a nude victim of vicious psycho Gene Davis in the slasher-style Charles Bronson thriller *10 to Midnight* and a hooker in the serial killer flick *The Night Stalker*. She also played Michael Jackson's girlfriend in MJ's classic *Thriller* music video.
DVD availability: *10 to Midnight* is stalking DVD courtesy of MGM, while *The Night Stalker* was unleashed by First Run Features. *Thriller* can be found on the Sony BMG Music Entertainment label.
Where is she now? *Olivia* currently lives in Sacramento, California.

Jeanne Tomasina

Playboy info: Miss November 1980

Notable horror credits: Had a small role as a dancer in the goofy Sasequatch flick *The Capture of Bigfoot*. Played victims of crazed psychos in the 80s thrillers *10 to Midnight* and *Double Exposure*

DVD availability: *10 to Midnight* was released on DVD by MGM. *Double Exposure* came out on the eight-ilm "After Dark Thrillers" collection from BCI Eclipse. *The Capture of Bigfoot* can be caught on the "Bigfoot Terror" DVD triple bill from Retromedia Entertainment.

Where is she now? Jeana works as a real estate agent in Southern California and was a regular on the reality TV series *The Real Housewives of Orange County*.

Karen Price

Playboy info: Miss January 1981

Notable horror credits: Had a small role as Karen in Wes Craven's *Swamp Thing*. Moreover, Price has worked as a stunt woman on such fright features as *The Wrath*, *Night Life*, *Cutting Class*, and *Maniac Cop 3: Badge of Silence*.

DVD availability: *Swamp Thing* was released on DVD by MGM. Both *The Wrath* and *Cutting Class* are available from Lionsgate, while *Maniac Cop 3: Badge of Silence* was issued on DVD in 1999 from Platinum. You can also get to relive a Region 1 DVD release.

Where is she now? More recently Karen has worked as an associate producer on such TV series as *Amazing Stories* and *Amazing Vacation Homes*.

Kymberly Herrin

Playboy info: Miss March 1981
Notable horror credit: Had a memorably sexy bit as the gorgeous female specter Dan Aykroyd has a hilariously kinky erotic dream about in the horror comedy blockbuster *Ghostbusters*.
DVD availability: *Ghostbusters* are still chasing after spooks on both DVD and Blu-ray thanks to Sony Pictures Entertainment.
Where is she now? Kimberly resides in her hometown of Santa Barbara, California.

Lorraine Michaels

Playboy info: Miss April 1981

Notable horror credit: Popped up in a small role as a doctor in the so-so medical horror chiller *B.O.R.N.*

DVD availability: *B.O.R.N.* was released on DVD by Troma under the alternate title *Merchants of Death*.

Where is she now? The mother of two children, Lorraine is the vice president of her kids' school as well as an active member of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

Heidi Sorenson

Playboy info: Miss July 1981

Notable horror credit: Briefly appeared in a small role as a sexy hooker victim of suave vampire Chris Sarandon in the excellent *Fright Night*.

DVD availability: *Fright Night* fans can sink their teeth into the DVD thanks to Columbia TriStar Home Video. *Fright Night* recently made its debut on Blu-ray through the independent company Twilight Time.

Where is she now? Heidi lives on the beach in Southern California with her husband and two children.



Ola Ray smiles at Michael Jackson in werewolf makeup on the set of the *Thriller* video.

Susan Smith

Playboy info: Miss September 1981

Notable horror credit: Appeared in a small part as a near victim of deranged mama's boy Dan Grimaldi in the early 80s horror exploitation flick *Don't Go in the House*.

DVD availability: *Don't Go in the House* can be savored in all its seamy and slimy glory on DVD thanks to those fine folks at Shriekshow.

Where is she now? Susan's current whereabouts are unknown.

Shannon Tweed

Playboy info: Miss November 1981; named Playmate of the Year in 1982

Notable horror credits: Played Peter Weller's wife in the fine killer art flick *Of Unknown Origin* and gave a hilarious performance as an uptight feminist college professor in the uproarious cult classic *Carnival Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*. Shannon also portrayed an ill-fated hooker in the crummy *Night Visitor*, tackled a co-starring part in the steamy horror-tinged erotic thriller *In the Cold of the Night*, and had a lead role in the straight-to-video movie *Possessed by the Night*. Tweed also appeared in two episodes of the trashy HBO horror anthology series *The Hitchhiker*.

DVD availability: *Of Unknown Origin* crawled its way onto DVD from Warner Brothers. *Carnival Women* was unleashed on DVD on the Cult Video label, and MGM brought *Night Visitor* to DVD. *In the Cold of the Night* can fog up your TV screen courtesy of Image Entertainment. *Possessed by the Night* has yet to receive a DVD release, while both *The Hitchhiker* episodes are available from Home Box Office Home Video.

Where is she now? Shannon is now the longtime love of famous KISS frontman Gene Simmons and stars with Gene on the reality TV series *Gene Simmons: Family Jewels*.

Kimberly McArthur

Playboy info: Miss January 1982
Notable horror credit: Played Amy in the schlock slasher sequel *Sleumer Party Massacre II*.
DVD availability: *Sleumer Party Massacre II* was released on DVD by New Concorde Entertainment.

Where is she now? Kimberly dropped out of the public spotlight after unsuccessfully replacing Robin Wright on the popular daytime soap opera *Santa Barbara*.

Karen Witter

Playboy info: Miss March 1982

Notable horror credits: *Wilder has acted in a handful of fright flicks that include *Out of the Dark*, *The Vinyard*, *Midnight*, *Buried Alive*, and *Popecorn*.*

DVD availability: *The Vinyard* was issued on DVD by Anchor Bay, while *Popecorn* was distributed by Elite Entertainment (the disc is now out of print). *Out of the Dark*, *Midnight*, and *Buried Alive* are all currently unavailable on DVD

Where is she now? *Karen continued to act up until 2004. Her most recent film was a co-starring role in the short *Iconoclastic Stone*.*

Lynda Wiesmeier

Playboy info: Miss July 1982

Notable horror credits: Showed up in the amusing horror comedy *Teen Wolf* and bared her breasts in the otherwise thoroughly dreadful zombie clunker *Evil Town*.

DVD availability: *Teen Wolf* was released on DVD by MGM, while no company has been brave enough to release *Evil Town* on DVD.

Where is she now? Lynda lives in Los Angeles, California.

Cathy St. George

Playboy info: Miss August 1982

Notable horror credit: Had a small part in the recent low-budget tongue-in-cheek horror anthology *Greve Danger*.

DVD availability: *Greve Danger* is available on DVD from Yellow Ape Productions.

Where is she now? Cathy lives in New York City and continues to work as a model, actress, and makeup artist.

Charlotte Kemp

Playboy info: Miss December 1982

Notable horror credits: Played the lead role of a men's magazine model who gets stalked by a psycho in the enjoyable slasher romp *Posed for Murder* and was the den mother of the crack phones in Frank Henenlotter's hilarious *Frankenhooker*. Moreover, Charlotte also had a small part in the goofy comedy *Repossessed*.

DVD availability: *Frankenhooker* was issued on DVD with a wealth of great extras from Uneearthed Films. The cult classic can also be found as a Special Edition Blu-ray from Synapse Films. *Posed for Murder* came out as part of the box set "Rare Filx Vol. 1" by Media Blasters, while *Repossessed* is available from Lionsgate.

Where is she now? Charlotte still is active as an actress. Her most recent role was in the 2007 film *Fairway to Heaven*.

Dona Speir

Playboy info: Miss March 1984

Notable horror credit: Had a small part as a nurse in the amusing horror comedy romp *Mortuary Academy*.

DVD availability: *Mortuary Academy* was issued on DVD from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Where is she now? Dona lives in Danville, California, and runs several websites.

Kathy Shower

Playboy info: Miss May 1985; named Playmate of the Year in 1988

Notable horror credits: Played a small part as a sexy lady mud wrestler in the Crown International mystery murder thriller *Double Exposure*, and had a more substantial role as a psychiatrist who's a practicing dominatrix on the side (!) in the silly horror comedy *Frankenstein General Hospital*.

DVD availability: *Double Exposure* was released by BCI Eclipse as part of the eight-film box set "After Dark Thrillers," while *Frankenstein General Hospital* has yet to get the Region 1 DVD treatment.

Where is she now? She is a regular guest at Glamourous all over the country and starred in the steamy video production

Kathy Shower: Playmate Model Man.

Devin DeVasquez

Playboy info: Miss June 1985

Notable horror credits: Played a virgin (!) in *House II: The Second Story* and appeared as a Glamorous Gyno-American in *Citizen Toxic: The Toxic Avenger IV*.

DVD availability: *House II: The Second Story* is available on DVD from Anchor Bay Entertainment. *Citizen Toxic* can be purchased from those fine folks at Troma.

Where is she now? Author of the book *The Naked Truth about a Pinup Model*.

Hope Marie Carlton

Playboy info: Miss July 1985

Notable horror credits: Besides a brief, but memorably sexy topless cameo in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*, Hope also appeared in the fright flicks *Slaughterhouse Rock*, *Slumber Party Massacre III*, *Ghoulies III: Ghoulies Go to College*, and the epic TV miniseries adaptation of Stephen King's *The Stand*.

DVD availability: The fourth *Elm Street* flick can be readily found from New Line Home Video. The complete miniseries for *The Stand* was released by Republic Pictures, while *Slumber Party Massacre III* was issued by New Concordia.

Neither *Slaughterhouse Rock* nor *Ghoulies III: Ghoulies Go to College* have received official Region 1 DVD releases.

Where is she now? Hope now lives in Colorado.

Julie McCullough

Playboy info: Miss February 1986

Notable horror credits: Had a small part in the terrific 1988 remake of *The Blob* and a slightly bigger role in the crappy slasher-style thriller *The Baby Doll Murders*.

DVD availability: *The Blob* cozed its way onto DVD from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. Nobody has bothered to give *The Baby Doll Murders* a DVD release.

Where is she now? Julie now works full-time as a stand-up comic and part-time as a Playboy Bunny.

Teri Weigel

Playboy info: Miss April 1986

Notable horror credits: Although best known for her X-rated adult movie roles, Teri nonetheless has appeared in a few more "legitimate" fright features that include *Cheerleader Camp*, *Return of the Killer Tomatoes!*, *Night Visitor*, *Innocent Blood* (cast as a stripper), and *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies*.

DVD availability: *Cheerleader Camp* is shakin' its bloody pom-poms on DVD from Anchor Bay. MGM barfed out the horrendously crappy *Night Visitor* on DVD. *Innocent Blood* is available on a disappointing no-frills disc on the Warner Brothers label. Aias, anyone has yet to be able to sink their teeth into *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies* on DVD. However, *Return of the Killer Tomatoes!* has rolled its goofy way on DVD from those fine folks at Anchor Bay.

Where is she now? Teri continues to "perform," so to speak, in explicit films.

Rebecca Ferratti

Playboy info: Miss June 1986

Notable horror credits: Appeared with fellow Playmate Teri Weigel in the amusingly lowbrow tongue-in-cheek slasher romp *Cheerleader Camp* and had a small part in the steamy soft-core bloodsucker outing *Embrace of the Vampire*.

DVD availability: *Anchor Bay* issued *Cheerleader Camp* on DVD, while *Embrace of the Vampire* is available in both R-rated (why bother?) and uncensored (now we're talkin') versions on DVD from New Line Home Video.

Where is she now? Rebecca still occasionally acts and does work for various charities.

Ava Fabian

Playboy info: Miss August 1988

Notable horror credits: Appeared alongside the ubiquitous Teri Weigel in *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies* and portrayed the Queen of Mars in the hilariously campy *Lobster Man from Mars*. Also, Ava had small parts in *To Die For* and *Love Bites: The Reluctant Vampire*.

DVD availability: *Lobster Man from Mars* received the Special Edition treatment (!) from Lionsgate, while *To Die For* was issued on DVD from Triumph Marketing. *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies* and *Love Bites* are both currently unavailable on DVD.

Where is she now? Ava continued to act up until 2006.



Rebekka Armstrong

Playboy info: Miss September 1986

Notable horror credits: Popped up, along with fellow Playmate Doree Spier, in a small part as a nurse in the horror comedy *Mortuary Academy* and had a more substantial role in the fun low-budget flick *The Immortalizer*.

DVD availability: *Mortuary Academy* is available from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, while *The Immortalizer* has yet to be immortalized on DVD.

Where is she now? Rebekka is now a competitive bodybuilder who lives in Los Angeles, California.

Laurie Ann Carr

Playboy info: Miss December 1986

Notable horror credit: Appeared along with fellow Playmates Rebekka Armstrong and Doree Spier in a small part as a nurse in *Mortuary Academy*.

DVD availability: *Mortuary Academy* is scaring up laughs on DVD from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Where is she now? Laurie now makes a living as a chiropractor.

Kymberly Paige

Playboy info: Miss May 1987

Notable horror credit: Here we go again, Kymberly is featured along with fellow Playmates Rebekka Armstrong, Doree Spier, and Laurie Ann Carr as a nurse in *Mortuary Academy*.

DVD availability: I think we all know by now that this flick is available from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Where is she now? Current whereabouts unknown.

Brandi Brandt

Playboy info: Miss October 1987

Notable horror credit: Appeared as a Glamorous Gyno-American in *Citizen Toxic: The Toxic Avenger IV*.

DVD availability: *Citizen Toxic* was released on DVD by Troma (of course).

Where is she now? Was implicated in a cocaine smuggling ring in 2009, currently her whereabouts are unknown.

India Allen

Playboy info: Miss December 1987, named Playmate of the Year in 1988

Notable horror credit: Played a news anchor in the Troma horror comedy *Tales from the Crapper*.

DVD availability: *Tales from the Crapper* is available on DVD from Troma (of course).

Where is she now? India resides in Pacific Grove, California.

Kari Whitman

Playboy info: Miss February 1988 (as Ken Kennel)

Notable horror credit: Had a sizable co-starring role in the ludicrous *Phantom of the Mask: Eric's Revenge*.

DVD availability: *Phantom of the Mask* was issued on DVD (which looks like it was taken from a poor VHS transfer) from the cut-rate budget label Echo Bridge Home Entertainment.

Where is she now? Kari now works as an interior designer.

Susie Owens

Playboy info: Miss March 1988

Notable horror credit: Played Katie in the witty tongue-in-cheek sci-fi horror comedy blast *They Bite*.

DVD availability: The DVD for *They Bite* is, alas, currently out of print.

Where is she now? Unknown.

Eloise DeJoria

Playboy info: Miss April 1988

Notable horror credit: Made a brief appearance in the low-budget vampire film *To Die For*.

DVD availability: *To Die For* is available on DVD from Triumph Marketing under the alternate title of *Dracula: The Love Story to Die For*.

Where is she now? Eloise is still acting in movies.

Helle Michaelson

Playboy info: Miss August 1988

Notable horror credit: Had a minor role in the hilariously horrendous Swedish horror/action/thriller hybrid *Groftmorden*.

DVD availability: This ghastly hunk of celluloid cheese has yet to get an official Region 1 DVD release, although it has been issued on DVD in Sweden.

Where is she now? Current whereabouts unknown.

Pia Reyes

Playboy info: Miss November 1988

Notable horror credits: Yet another Playmate who appeared in *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies*, plus played Alicia in *Return of the Living Dead 3*.

DVD availability: *Return of the Living Dead 3* was released on DVD by Artisan Entertainment, while *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies* has unfortunately not been given the DVD treatment.

Where is she now? Pia was arrested in Oak Bay, British Columbia, Canada, in 2001 because of her impostor and con artist husband Christopher Rocancourt, who was later cleared of all the charges after she convinced the authorities that she knew nothing of her hubby's criminal activities.

Kata Karkkainen

Playboy info: Miss December 1988

Notable horror credit: Co-starred in the lackluster Finnish horror comedy *Katolokkajat*.

DVD availability: This obscure import has yet to be released on Region 1 DVD.

Where is she now? Kata is now a successful author and screenwriter in her native Finland.

Erika Eleniak

Playboy info: Miss July 1989

Notable horror credits: Played a victim of the titular people-gobbling, gelatinous and amorphous mass in the terrific 1988 remake of *The Blob*, had a lead role in *Bordello of Blood*, and another starring role in the godawful sci-fi horror flick *Dracula 3000*.

DVD availability: *Dracula 3000* was issued on DVD from Liongate. *The Blob* oozed onto DVD on this Sony Pictures Home Entertainment label while *Bordello of Blood* is available from Universal Home Entertainment.

Where is she now? Erika is still acting.

Petra Verkaik

Playboy info: Miss December 1989

Notable horror credit: Petra's yet another Playmate who appeared in *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies*.

DVD availability: *Auntie Lee's Meat Pies* hasn't been released on DVD.

Where is she now? Petra lives in Toluca Lake, California, and runs her own racy website.



A bevy of beauties from *Mortuary Academy*.



JOE DANTE PRESENTS TRAILERS FROM HELL! VOLUME TWO

Kevin Sean Michaels caught up with the man who gave us *Piranha*, *Gremlins*, *The Howling*, and *Matinee* at this year's Comic-Con in San Diego. Joe was there promoting his *Trailers From Hell! Volume Two* DVD compilation.

SCREEN: Can you tell me how the *Trailers From Hell!* project originated?

JOE DANTE: Well, I'm a movie collector, I've collected a lot of movies, 16 and 35, and I had a lot of 35-millimeter trailers. And I had them in a vault, and I thought, "Gee, nobody's getting to see these, and maybe I could do something with them, maybe I could put them on the Internet or something." And then I realized, well, that's kind of not very interesting on its own. So I did a couple of commentaries to the trailers and I put them up on the Internet. They sat there for a while, and then a couple of friends of mine saw them and said, "Oh, I'd like to see that, I'd like to talk about a couple of trailers." And it sort of snowballed . . . now we have over 600 trailers up on the site, and 40 different people who talk about them.

Now are these movies that were important to you influential in any way?

All movies that I see are influential. I mean, I've been influenced by every movie I've ever seen. But what it's evolved into is people talking about movies that meant something to them when they were growing up, or movies that influenced their careers. Most of the commentators are producers and directors and writers. And they all talk about what the movies meant to them. And it's sort of like a mini-film-school, I mean, the trailers are only three, four minutes long, so instead of a long audio commentary that most people don't listen to on a DVD, you can actually find out a lot of interesting information in one fell swoop. And you can also run the original trailer without the commentary, so it's a win-win.

So, Joe, what does an excellent trailer have to have? What are the components of a good trailer?

A good trailer has to make you want to see the movie. Many of the trailers today make you feel like you've already seen the movie. The trick is to try to tease the picture and try to make it look like it's about something that's really interesting and that you need to know more about. But the overall kind of trailers today, half the time they include the ending in the trailer—anything to make people go in and see it once. But that's not the way it works; trailers are supposed to excite your interest, they're not supposed to make you feel like, "I don't need to see it."

Were independent films different in those days as far as trailer-wise? If they had a big explosion at the end of the film, did they have to show that in the trailer because that's all they had going for themselves?

A lot of times you had to take whatever action elements you had, and you had to exaggerate them to make them look like there was more action in the movie than there was. But that's only in the case of movies that really weren't very good. Movies that had good stories, good actors, and good scenes—you could make a really good trailer out of a well-written movie.

Do you have any examples of trailers from your films that may have been re-cut?

I have trailers for movies of mine that are not very good and didn't help the movies become successful. First of all, it's difficult to do a trailer for your own film, because you tend to be protective of the movie, and there's things you don't want in the trailer, because you're afraid you're going to give something away. That's usually not a good recipe for making trailers. So, I find that, when I make a movie, I usually farm it out to someplace else. The problem is that, if it's a studio movie, they'll consult you on the trailer and they'll show it to you and you can give them your notes, but they don't have to take them, and they don't really care what you think. It's just a formality. And a lot of times I've had pictures that had trailers that were just poor, and they made the movie look not very interesting. And that's worse, because it's one of the first times that people actually get exposed to your movie. Before the TV spots come out, before the newspaper ads come out, there is the trailer. And if you don't get a good impression on your first hit with the audience, sometimes you can't walk it back, you can't bring them back again, they say, "Oh, it doesn't look good, I don't want to see it."

You've influenced so many people with your movies. I mean, this is now coming back around for you. People like Tarantino have cited your movies and so forth. How do you feel about that? How does it feel to be sort of the person who has influenced a generation after you?

I am now old enough that I'm in the place of where Roger Corman was when I met him. I had seen all his movies, and I was really a big fan. And I met Jack Arnold, I met a lot of people whose work I admired, and I was of course influenced by them. And now I'm old enough that there are people who have actually been influenced by me.

Are you taking on protégés now, as Roger Corman did?

You have to work more often than I do to take on proteges.

Is it something that you've done in the past, or are you always hands-on with your own movies?

Yeah, I try to be, as much as I'm allowed. Obviously the closer you are to your movie, the happier you're going to be with it. The trick is to try to find sympathetic producers and studios, who will be happy to let you make the movie that you want to make because it's the same movie they want to make. What sometimes happens is in the middle of making the movie, they decide that's not the movie they wanted to make; they want to do something different. And that's when you get the tension, and that's when you get the arguments, and that's when you get a movie that usually doesn't come out looking like anything but a hodgepodge. So it is okay to mislead people in the trailer, or do you feel that you need to be honest about what the content is?

No, I think if it's a good trailer, you can say whatever you want. I mean, Alfred Hitchcock used to do trailers where he wouldn't show any scenes from the movie. He would just talk, you know.

I was curious, have you seen sort of homages to your movies in other movies, and how do you feel about that?

I've had movies of mine remade, which is the ultimate homage. And I've seen pieces of things of mine in other people's pictures, and nods, and little winks, and saying, well, you know, "I saw it"—which is what I do, so I'm always pleased.

Do you think the use of trailers has changed with all these crazy booths and everything online and so forth?

There are more screens in our lives than there ever were when I was a kid. There was a TV screen and there was a movie screen, and that was it. Now, you walk through the gigantic football field of stuff, and the sensory overload is unbelievable.

How do you react to it?

It's pop culture multiplied by a zillion. It's very intensive, and not an environment that, frankly, I can be in for a real long time. It's sort of like a big wrap party. You know, you go to your wrap party, and usually you come home with a sore throat because you've had to yell at people because the music was so loud.

But that's after some accomplishments have happened . . .

Well, a lot of these things are accomplishments. I mean, these people are hawking things that they've already made. And this is the best way to try to get people to know about it. But there's so much competition. There are so many things competing for people's eyeballs, that to just step out of the crowd and try to get your thing noticed is so hard.

What do you think about the big studios pulling out this year?

I think it's an economic thing. The economy's in trouble, a lot of people have scaled back—a lot of the people who were here at Comic-Con have scaled back from what they did last year.

Do you think it helps the independent people at all, or has no effect?

It gives them more space, you know, it gives them more eyeballs looking at their stuff.



EXTRA! EXTRA!

SCREEN CHATS WITH DANIEL GRIFFITH

SCREEN: What led to you becoming a producer/director of cult film documentaries?

DANIEL GRIFFITH: My introduction into the world of cult film documentaries, which includes DVD supplemental material, really branched out from one 'passion' project. Several years ago, I decided to commit most of my spare time researching and conceptualizing a feature documentary dedicated to the life and film releases of K. Gordon Murray. It was an experiment, really—an opportunity to challenge both myself and the limits of my vision or creativity. If I could get an audience to care about a distributor, whom no really knows, and his vast library of cinematic obscurities, which no one really enjoys, then I could honestly prove something to myself. But like a painter or a sculptor, as I immersed myself into the project, I discovered a personal part of me within it. And over time, the story of K. Gordon Murray developed a life of its own.

In the meantime, I was offered a chance to produce and direct bonus features for a proposed 'special edition' of William Greife's 1972 film, *Stanley* (released by the now defunct, BCI Eclipse). This was due, in part, to a personal recommendation by Greife, himself, whom I interviewed previously for the Murray documentary. I guess he was impressed by my 'one-man-band' approach. He knew I could deliver something worthwhile within their meager budget. Of course, I went beyond the call of duty and single-handedly produced/directed all the bonus materials on the disc, which included two commentaries, an hour-long documentary on the making of the film, and more. But, sadly, this release would be BCI Eclipse's swan song. The company closed its doors shortly after, and the title slowly went out of print. (NOTE: The now out-of-print edition will be re-released by indie label Code Red this October with all the original Ballyhoo extras.)

Around the same time, Shout! Factory acquired the distribution rights for the popular television series, *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. Shout! was basically continuing what Rhino started years before, but with an added ingredient... more bonus materials. The guys at Shout! have a lot of passion for the series. They had asked me, on the basis of my work on the Murray documentary, if I was interested in producing some bonus features for the upcoming DVD release of the MST3K version of Murray's *Santa Claus*. And the critical success of that piece led to more MST3K opportunities. The crew at Shout! Factory are great to work with! So it could be said that the documentary productions that followed are really just an extension of the K. Gordon Murray project.

What DVDs feature your work?

After the release of *Dark Side of Eden: The Making of Stanley* (obviously for the *Stanley* DVD) and the *Santa Claus Conquers the Devil* (for Shout! Factory's *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume XVI*), I was asked to do a number of interesting projects, ranging from the parodical to the unintelligible. Last year alone, I produced and directed documentaries on *Shanty Town* (filled *Everbody's Don't* the *Shanty Town* for something weird), *The Beast of Yucca Flats* (No Dialogue Necessary: Making The Beast of Yucca Flats, for Shout! Factory), *Apache Rifles* (Please, Hold the Spaghetti: The End of the Conventional Western for VCI Entertainment), as well as Ed Wood's misguided film, *Bride of the Monster* (Close Your Mouth: Making the Bride, Unmaking the Legend for Shout! Factory). But my two favorite projects of 2010 have to be *Let There Be Light: The Odyssey of Dark Star*, the feature-length documentary exploring the making of John Carpenter and Dan O'Bannon's first theatrical film, and *The Bloodiest Show on Earth: The Making of Vampire Circus*.

Along with the work I did for the MST3K VHS/Gamers box set (*Gamers VHS: The Chiodo Brothers*), I also partnered with modern cult filmmaker Larry Blamire on *Jam Handy to the Rescue* (included on the *Manos*, the *Hand of Fate* special edition DVD from Shout! Factory). This production, conceived by myself and written by Blamire, is different from the standard documentary or bonus features format. It is truly an educational short film! It combines all the conventional tropes found in vintage shorts, with a biography on the life of industrial film emissary Henry Jamison Handy. It's a very unusual piece, filled with hidden references to Handy's vast legacy of short films.

Producer, filmmaker, documentary extraordinaire, Daniel Griffith is best known as the go-to-guy when it comes to DVD extras. His work can be seen on DVDs from such prestigious companies as Synapse Films, VCI Entertainment, and Shout! Factory. Daniel also owns the production company Ballyhoo Motion Pictures, where he creates incredible featurettes that focus on bizarre movies and the directors who make these low-budget gems.



Daniel poses for a picture with *Dark Night of the Scarecrow* director Frank De Felitta.



Hammer documentary Daniel Griffith with the original miniature used in Hammer's *Kiss of the Vampires*. Film historian Wayne Kinsey discusses the piece in the documentary short, *The Props that Hammer Built*, featured on the upcoming *Twins of Evil* Blu-ray.

documentary will be released! I have had to place it on the back burner while I wrap up other obligations. I am confident that the final product will be worth the wait.

Is there any news on a release date for *They Came from the Swamp*?
We are currently searching for better materials to cut footage from. That is the major setback. Most of Greife's films have fallen into the gray market arena. No company claims ownership of the films, therefore... no one company has decent materials to make masters from. But our search is slowly coming to an end and a release for the documentary is looming. We'll see how it goes!

What work did you do for the upcoming Blu-ray of *Dark Night of the Scarecrow*?

I directed a half-hour documentary on the making of the film, entitled *Bubba Didn't Do It: 30 Years of the Scarecrow*. The documentary features interviews with just about everyone involved (sadly excluding actor Charles Dunning, who declined for health reasons). *Dark Night of the Scarecrow* is a film I deeply admire. I love the film's restraint concerning the character of the scarecrow. In a time when cinematic marauders, like Jason from *Friday the 13th*, were hacking their way across the screen, this film chose a more classic, supernatural approach. It is one of the best made-for-TV horrors to date, and I am honored that VCI gave me the opportunity to play a part in its future. **What other projects do you have slated for this year?**

Well, I am currently wrapping up three documentaries for VCI Entertainment's 80th Anniversary Blu-ray release of *A Christmas Carol*, starring Alastair Sims, as well as several exciting documentaries and featurettes for Hammer's *Twins of Evil* (released by Synapse Films). I am sincerely hoping to top the work I did for *Vampire Circus* with that one!

Another exciting upcoming documentary short is *Trial of the Creeper: Making The Brute Man*. This half-hour documentary explores the life of afflicted B-movie actor Rondo Hatton, and how it parallels the character he portrays in his final film, *The Brute Man*. This documentary will premiere on the *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume XXIV* DVD set this December.

I am also involved in the restoration for the upcoming HD version of K. Gordon Murray's *Santa Claus* (released by VCI Entertainment).

The *Wonder World* of K. Gordon Murray was to air on Turner Classic Movies, but was pulled at the last minute. Do you know why this happened?

A number of things fell apart at the last minute, but it was purely my decision. Obviously, there were rights issues to contend with. But the

DANIEL GRIFFITH CHATS WITH MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 CREATOR JOEL HODGSON



If you are a dedicated cult film fan, then you may be familiar with such films as *The Beast of Yucca Flats*, *Blood Waters of Dr. Z*, or *"Manos" The Hands of Fate*. Chances are, even the most seasoned film buff would be baffled by such titles if not for the exploits of the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* television series. Originally airing from 1988 to 1999, this unique comedy series dedicated each episode to lampooning B-movies, most of which were public domain. The program originated as a local cable-access television show (based out of Minneapolis-Saint Paul), but eventually expanded into a worldwide phenomenon. Even though the series was cancelled during its tenth season, the *MST3K* legacy continues today thanks to the efforts of pop culture magnate Shout! Factory and their acclaimed multi-episode DVD box sets. This fall, the retro-label will unleash two separate *Mystery Science Theater 3000* releases. First up is the stand alone special edition of the infamous *"Manos" The Hands of Fate* episode (now available), followed by the box set *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume XXII*, due out this December. Documentarian Daniel Griffith caught up with *MST3K* creator, Joel Hodgson, to talk about these upcoming releases.

SCREEN: How did the *MST3K* crew discover "*Manos*" *The Hands of Fate*?

JOEL HODGSON: *Manos* was found the way all our films were found—in a big cardboard box of VHS tapes that was sent by HBO Downtown Productions. This was our de facto screening process that helped us all determine which films to license for the show. It was Frank Conniff's job to do the first pass of screeners, as he probably loves movies more than any of us, but beyond that Frank just had a great feel for the material even now when we are selecting a Cinematic Titanic title. I always get Frank's opinion before we license. Obviously, there were many films Frank rejected for various reasons [yes, there may be films that are crumtier than *Manos*], and then we would screen Frank's selects during lunchtime, which seems sort of counterintuitive, but worked well with the *MST* production schedule.

Out of all the features you're crew had access to, what made this film such a prime candidate for riffing (besides the obvious)?

It wasn't really that much a designed decision—like, we weren't saying to each other, "This is the worst movie we've ever done and it's going to be famous because of it." Frankly, I didn't even notice how bad *Manos* was until we were writing the riffs for it. Then, I remember looking around the room to see how other people were handling it. I realized then it might be a mistake to say, "Hey, everyone, maybe doing this movie isn't a good idea," as it's important that the creator/ exec producer not "spook" the writers' room with doubt. Looking back, it was a haul, clearly, but we got through it.

On its own merit, "*Manos*" *The Hands of Fate* is almost unbearable to watch ONCE. How many times did you and the writing staff have to view the film in order to complete the script for the episode?

From writing to performance, it was usually six or seven times.

How much of the on-screen suffering in the actual episode is reflective of the off-camera effects to the film? Any obstacles?

I don't really remember other than what I've all ready described: however, I screened the show recently, and I noticed that we are completely aware of how terrible this film was—and we used it a bunch in the host segments, with Forrester and Frank going so far as to apologizing on two separate occasions for how bad the movie is. So clearly, by the time the show was written, we all knew what we were up against—maybe the worst *MST3K* film ever. In the episodes closing sketch, the "Mads" receive a pizza delivered by the one and only Torgo (played my Mike Nelson). What led to Mike being selected for this role?

By this time in the life of the show, it was a well-established conceit that Mike would always play the "special guest" character from the movie, so he HAD to be Torgo.

What led to the decision to bring the character back for future installments of *MST3K*?

I suspect it was because Mike as Torgo is so funny!

The *Manos* episode is preempted by the second part of *Hired!*, a short subject produced by the Jam Handy Organization. What led to the decision to incorporate early industrial/educational films in random episodes of *MST3K*?

Early on we realized that some of the films that we were using were just not long enough for the running time of the show, so using these short subject "industrial" films worked perfectly to stretch the show out to the right broadcast length.

What are some of your childhood memories concerning industrial/educational films? How did these memories play a part in the eventual *MST3K* concept?

When I was growing up in the sixties and seventies, it was very common to watch these short films in school, usually when a teacher was absent or you were stuck inside because of the weather. I loved it so, because back then the films were actual film prints projected with 16mm projectors, and by looking at the films and projectors with the lights on, you could start to unravel the mystery of how movies were made. This brought the entire film projection process just close to a darkened classroom of hyperactive kids jacked up on hormones and pre-sweetened cereals.

When you think of the Jam Handy Organization (not only in relation to *MST3K*), what are some of the first memories that come to mind?

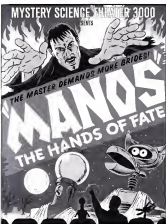
I remember lots of science films, and also in sixth grade, we watched the entire series of civil defense movies that were designed to teach kids how to survive in the event of a nuclear attack, information I still treasure today. But more than the actual content of the films, in the classroom, when the projector was running and the teacher may be down the hall in the teachers lounge, things would happen: sometimes the film would break and the movie would stop, and some kids would keep talking in the manner of the narrator of the film. Or sometimes the kid in charge of the projector would start to run it in reverse and some kids would add voices, and sometimes, if everything went perfect, some smart and funny kid would land a truly funny riff that would make everyone laugh.

Do you have any plans to include early short subjects in future editions of the Cinematic Titanic live tour?

We don't have any plans one way or another—it's nice to know that they are out there if we ever get desperate.

What do you think was the key ingredient to the success of the "*Manos*" *The Hands of Fate* *MST3K* episode?

Personally, I think *Manos* illustrates just how big a role the movie can play in the series: sometimes, we as the writers/performers could take a very uninteresting film and sprinkle our secret sauce on it and make something new and sometimes something special out of it—a new work that is markedly better than the original. However, in terms of *Manos*, it's so wonderfully flawed, I think it got its sauce on us.



DVD REVIEWS

HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS: THE GODFATHER OF GORE (2010)

Directed by Jimmy Maslon and Frank Henenlotter
(2010) Something Weird Video/
Image Entertainment DVD

Unlike his contemporaries in exploitation films who lived in poverty and obscurity, director Herschell Gordon Lewis has died long enough to enjoy the accolades due to him, as well as spend the many millions he made as a direct marketing guru. This most arguable auteur is now the subject of a flashy new documentary on his life and times as the real-life Wizard of Gore. Shot over a period five years with a crew of three, *Herschell Gordon Lewis: The Godfather of Gore* depicts a savvy gent who knew exactly what he was doing every step on the blood-caked way.

Explicit violence had been bubbling in cinema from the silent era onwards, but it took Lewis to change the game with a trio of low-budget Indies to bring the red stuff to the fore. *Blood Feast* (1963), a cheerfully demented tale of an Egyptian caterer (Mal Arnold) conjuring up the ingredients for an unknowing debutante (Connie Mason) coming out ball. Tongues are torn out, limbs are severed, and beach bunnies are nailed, all of it to the sounds of the audience's raucous, healthy laughter. Like a Walt Whitman poem, "no good, but it was the first of its type," *Blood Feast* featured acting so bad and color photography so garish, it becomes in the words of some forgotten fanzine writer "a vision of the world as imagined by psychotic eight-year olds." Allowing the audience to laugh uproariously at violent death, such a concept couldn't fail and *Blood Feast* raked in millions.

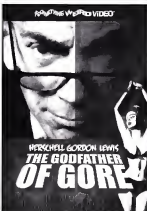
The follow-up, 2000 *Maniacs* (1964) is the one film Lewis wants to be remembered for, and rightly so. A carload of city slickers rolls into a small town brimming with Southern hospitality, subtly underestimating the local yokels to become grist for their mill. 2000 *Maniacs* addresses America's dirtiest secret, a class structure that disenfranchises and ridicules poor whites that live in rural areas. To paraphrase a Jeff Galloway joke, "You might be a redneck, if... you chop off the arm of a lady after she calls you a fuck!" 2000 *Maniacs* is even more significant artifact as it played small-town drive-ins not that far removed from the murderous backwater depicted in the film.

The bookend of this trilogy, *Color Me Blood Red* (1965) is a modest affair about a mad artist who uses the blood of his victims as paint for his canvases. Set in mostly one location, *Color Me* does offer a few jobs at the highbrow art set who hail the artist's crusty canvases as masterpieces, in an extension of the ideas found in Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* (1960).

Lewis would return to the horror genre numerous times, as well as a host of other types of films it is here where the documentary is somewhat lacking. Too much time is spent on the "nudie cutie" phase of his career. This section offers much pastel-colored eye candy of girls in beehive hairdos and little else, this section serves as a pleasing counterpoint to the ghouly visuals that follow. Surprisingly, the documentary only briefly mentions Lewis' substantial contributions to the "thicksploitation" genre, such as *Moonshine Mountain* (1954), and *This Stuff'll Kill Ya!* (1977).

In all fairness, at an hour and 46 minutes in length, the documentary couldn't possibly find the time to cover all of the 35-plus films in Lewis' oeuvre. Some of Lewis' more interesting features are dropped entirely, such as his failed attempt at a Ross Hunter melodrama, *Suburban Roulette* (1968). The documentary touches on Lewis' foray into kiddie matinee fare, *The Magic Land of Mother Goose* (1967), but neglects *Jimmy the Boy Wonder* (1966).

Lewis always injected wit and humor into all of his features, along with a modicum of ambition. *The Wizard of Gore* (1970), starring Lewis stalwart Ray Segar (who is extensively interviewed) as Montag the Magnificent, injects a weird, extended sequence wherein the sloozy stage magician hypnotizes an entire town in a TV broadcast. The ending, where a girl laughs as she is brutally disemboweled, insisting that "life is but a dream," is something grindhouse audiences weren't prepared for at the time.



documentary with trepidations. Lewis is a highly public figure and oft-quoted, and what furthermore, is left to be said? Rest assured, there is a cavalcade of fresh, new stuff on display. The documentary reunites Lewis with partner in crime, the late David F. Friedman, as they return to St. Cloud, Florida, the town that served as the setting for 2000 *Maniacs*. Both Lewis and Friedman are welcomed by crowd waving confederate flags, but be on the lookout to spot the little old lady in the background waving a hangman's noose! The film does a highly admirable job of finding surviving cast and crew members to interview. Curiously, Connie Mason, much-despised by Lewis and described as a windup doll missing her key, isn't interviewed. Mason does appear singing along with Lewis to "The South is Gone! Rose Again" theme from 2000 *Maniacs* at a convention appearance over the end credits.

One interview depicts the wild and woolly world of independent filmmaking in the sixties that today would land Lewis and his cronies in jail. The child actor who played the bratty blonde kid in 2000 *Maniacs* tells how he was sent on location without parents or any chaperones of any kind, and was awarded his own hotel room!

The documentary also features clips from the never completed Lewis science-fiction feature *An Eye For An Eye*, starring Lewis leading man William Kerwin (described by some in the documentary as an alcoholic and sex fiend). There are tales and trivia galore, such as a very young Harvey Korman starring in an early Lewis feature *Living Venus* (1961). Again, the fact that a very young Karen Black acted in Lewis' first feature, *The Prime Time* (1958) isn't mentioned.



Three of Herschell's best known films—*Two Thousand Maniacs*, *Blood Feast* and *Color Me Blood Red* are now available as *The Blood Trilogy* on Blu-ray.

Lewis' attempt at more mainstream horror, *A Taste of Blood* (1967), a modern retelling of the *Dracula* tale flopped soundly. The *Monster Times* tabloid of the seventies pronounced *Taste* as the worst horror film EVER, noting its two-hour running time as "120 minutes of impeccable boredom." *Something Weird* (1967), has moments of strange beauty and surrealism. *The Grosseque Teosoma* (1967), with its stapled on prologue of two Styrofoam wig heads holding a conversation, caused musical troublemaker Boyd Rice (coincidentally, also the subject of a four-hour documentary, *Iconoclast*) to reportedly look around the theater to make sure it wasn't all a bad dream he was having.

The Gore Gore Girls (1972) was Lewis' valedictorian comment on the genre he created, with gore so ridiculous it was as if the severed tongue in *Blood Feast* had finally made its way into a bruised cheek. It must be noted that the documentary doesn't address Lewis' two most recent returns to filmmaking, *Blood Feast II: All You Can Eat* (2002) and *The Un-Ch Show* (2006).

Horror and exploitation fans may view this documentary with trepidations. Lewis is a highly public figure and oft-quoted, and what furthermore, is left to be said? Rest assured, there is a cavalcade of fresh, new stuff on display. The documentary reunites Lewis with partner in crime, the late David F. Friedman, as they return to St. Cloud, Florida, the town that served as the setting for 2000 *Maniacs*. Both Lewis and Friedman are welcomed by crowd waving confederate flags, but be on the lookout to spot the little old lady in the background waving a hangman's noose! The film does a highly admirable job of finding surviving cast and crew members to interview. Curiously, Connie Mason, much-despised by Lewis and described as a windup doll missing her key, isn't interviewed. Mason does appear singing along with Lewis to "The South is Gone! Rose Again" theme from 2000 *Maniacs* at a convention appearance over the end credits.

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Director John Waters and drive-in critic Joe Bob Briggs are on hand to offer their observations, and this reviewer was highly intrigued to discover that *Blood Feast* played in an old-time movie palace in Hollywood in its initial theatrical run! They even put film critic Kevin Thomas out of the moldboards to recount his negative review, as well interview that theater's former usher who vividly recalls the audience's bemused reactions.

Herschell Gordon Lewis: *The Godfather of Gore* comes highly recommended. Its only flaw is its inability to fully encapsulate the complexity of a man who at one time scratched out feature films for as little as \$8,000 a piece, now living in a splendorous home with gold-plated bathroom fixtures. Then again, what could? DVD extras include: over an hour of deleted scenes, an H.G. Lewis trailer reel, rare Lewis Short: *Hot Night at the Go-Go*; and a gallery of H.G. Lewis exploitation art.

Greg Goodsell

HORROR EXPRESS
Directed by Eugenio Martin
(1972) Severin Films Blu-Ray



Thanks to its public domain status and its pairing of genre legends Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, *Horror Express* is a DVD "multi-pack" staple which is almost as familiar as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Little Shop of Horrors*. So what's to possibly gain by yet another DVD release of *Horror Express*? How about an original negative transfer packed with the sort of extras that have eluded this film throughout the entire history of home video?

Just in case you need a refresher course, Lee is anthropologist Alexander Saxton, who has recently unearthed a proto-scientific treatise in the form of a frozen humanoid figure, which he intends to transport from Peking to London aboard the Trans-Siberian Express. Local customs hassles are bad enough, but Saxton is especially perturbed to find himself sharing a train compartment with fellow scientist Dr. Wells (Cushing). To add to Saxton's frustration, a wild-eyed, long-haired "spiritual adviser" (Alberto de Mendoza) to a traveling Count and Countess (George Rigaud and Silvia Tortosa) declares that he senses pure evil emanating from Saxton's find. Well, it's certainly true that no good befalls anyone who attempts to tamper with the contents of Saxton's crate—such miscreants are soon found dead with their eyeballs drained pure white and (we eventually learn) their brains smooth as eggshells. The unsolved murders are, of course, reported to the authorities, leading Captain Kazan (Telly Savalas) to board the train with his squad of Cossacks. (Best line: the indignant Countess tells Kazan "I'll have you sent to Siberia," to which Kazan replies "I am in Siberia!")

In addition to the very-well-known leads, *Horror Express* also offers plenty of additional faces familiar to fans of Spanish horror. Angel del Pozo (*Assignment Terror*) is on hand as Yevushenko, Helga Line (*The Mummy's Revenge*) is only too happy to assist Saxton and Wells in their impromptu forensic research, and Victor Israel (the inkeeper with Marty Feldman eyes from *The Witches Mountain*) puts in an appearance as an ill-fated baggage handler. It would be tempting to suggest that the only thing missing from *Horror Express* (directed by Eugenio Martin of *It Happened at Nightmares Inn*) is Paul Naschy himself, but someone perhaps even more appropriate also missed the train. The spiritualist certainly seems to be correct when he insists that Satan is at work, but Saxton's revived creature harbors secrets that intriguingly swerve the story into the realm of science fiction. Hmm . . . an extraterrestrial taken as the manifestation of Old Scratch himself? Why wasn't Professor Quatermass aboard? Claustrophobic atmosphere, gruesome effects and a crowd-piling gathering of the walking dead combine to make *Horror Express* a perennial favorite.

Until now, the definitive presentation of the film could be found on a long-out-of-print Image Entertainment DVD. But Severin's new Blu-ray release easily eclipses the previous nifty disc with a bounty of extras (the film was shot in the 1.66:1 ratio, so don't look for any significant widescreen image "revelations"). All-new interviews are supplied by director Martin, producer Bernard Gordon (who reflects on his experience during the Joseph McCarthy scare) and John Gacavas (the composer of the lush, eerie score offers his remembrances of Telly Savalas). Peter Cushing is heard from in a vintage audio interview, the theatrical trailer is on hand, and Fangoria editor Chris Alexander provides an introduction. No matter how many copies of this film you may have already accumulated, you'd best make room for one more.

Shane M. Daltmann

THE LICKERISH QUARTET
Directed by Radley Metzger
(1970) Cult Epics Blu-ray / DVD



The work of American exploitation Radley Metzger is currently in the midst of both critical and commercial rediscovery in recent time, with a steady flow of video releases now hitting the market (as well as a retrospective conducted by UCLA). The director of such noted hardcore classics like *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* as well as a slew of softcore cult classics is receiving more attention than he has in decades. Further cementing his critical reassessment is the Cult Epics re-release for his 1970 arthouse classic, *The Lickerish Quartet*.

Opening with a quote directly from famed Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello's classic *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Lickerish Quartet* mirrors Pirandello's interest in dissolving the perceived wall between reality and illusion. Adapted from a short story by Metzger himself, the plot opens within an opulent drawing room within a majestic Italian castle high in the mountains. A wealthy couple, seemingly of old money, along with their son, watch a World War II-era, 18mm stag film projected onto their home screen. Both disgusted at the base acts being performed on-screen, as well as fascinated by the performers themselves, the trio vacillates between switching it off or watching it to the end.

Meanwhile, carefully composed black and white images of two couples in various acts of coitus are paraded across the screen. While not nearly as explicit as today's hardcore pornography, Metzger's performers certainly do not display shyness, and the imagery can still be discomforting to those uninterested in brazen depictions of sex. One blonde girl in particular, holds their attention via the contradiction of her virginal looks versus carnal voracity. After finally deciding to give their screening a rest, the family convenes at a local carnival to take in the sights, and stumble across a daredevil motorcycle troupe. In one of the film's best known sequences, a group of bikers ride up and along the walls of a sealed enclosure, perpendicular to the ground.

Blazing around at high speed, performing intricate maneuvers, the trio of riders holds their lives in each other's hands. Of particular interest are the chest-mounted POV shots that Metzger captures, literally putting the viewer behind the handle bars while riding around the walls. After the show ends, one motorcyclist in particular removes their helmet and reveals a woman. Ironically, this woman appears to be none other than the mystery blonde herself, (albeit now a brunette). Shocked and curious to know if this is indeed the same woman, both husband and wife invite her back home for an impromptu party, despite the son's protest. Upon arrival, the film is screened again with their guest, who feigns little interest or shock.

Disappointed by her reaction, the family allows the visitor to spend the night. In doing so though, they unleash an unknown force upon themselves, as this woman begins invading their individual dreams, piercing the trio's outward emotional armor, and revealing their fantasies, resentments, and fears to one another. If one were to seek out a cinematic precedent, *The Lickerish Quartet* clearly points back to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Trois Femmes*, in which a mysterious stranger (played by a young Terence Stamp) seduces an entire family of Italian bourgeoisie and promptly leaves, thus shattering their complacency and leaving them to reassess who's left over in their lives.

The Visitor (as played by Silvana Venturi) functions much the same way by single-handedly revealing the family's fears and secrets, while leaving the viewer unbalanced as to her actual identity. In addition, the blue movie itself begins to metamorphose as various scenes from it are replayed in repetition, with the family members themselves beginning to trade places with the original performers. This continuous merging process continues until the best ending, which turns the entire proceedings just witnessed on its head, without revealing any particular spoilers. So again, while a clear precedent can be found in *Trois Femmes*, other points of reference lead to literature too, namely Pirandello's work (as was previously discussed) and that of author/ filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet.

A French author celebrated in the heyday of the French New Wave and famous for helping craft Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, Robbe-Grillet's world of mystery, surrealism, and shifting identities can also be argued as a potential influence on Lickerish's overall tone. Setting aside thematic concerns, *The Lickerish Quartet* is worth a look to the average, curious film fan because it clearly (and lushly) evokes the baroque, '60s cool atmosphere of European pseudo-arthouse filmmaking.

An elegant mix of taste and schlock, the catchy, Ennio Morricone-esque soundtrack, overwrought production design and set work, scandalous costuming, and complex editing/ cinematography makes this a feast for the eyes (especially in the new transfer). In terms of visual tone, *The Lickerish Quartet* is closer to vintage Roger Vadim or Mario Bava than Fellini or Antonioni, but it still contains the joie de vivre that filmmaking of that era so blissfully exerted upon audiences.

Cult Epics has made a wise investment in this disc's special features by including a Metzger audio commentary, making-of documentary, soundtrack analysis, clips of original dailies, etc. In its day, *The Lickerish Quartet* was hailed by critics including Andy Warhol, noted *New York Times* reviewer Vincent Canby. Although today its value is more as a curiosity, the film's overall execution and earnest exploration of reality's edge makes this a worthwhile purchase.

Todd Kessler

DESTINATION INNER SPACE

Directed by Francis D. Lyon
(1966) Cheezy Flicks DVD

When a mysterious flying saucer lands near an underwater research laboratory, the Navy sends non-sonic Commander Wayne (Scott Brady) to investigate. He and the scientific team (which includes Gary Merrill, Sheree North, John Howard, Wendie Wagner, and Mike Road) soon discover the alien ship has unleashed an extraterrestrial giant man with poisonous claws and a penchant for mauling sailors.

Destination Inner Space is essentially a superficial retelling of *The Thing From Another World*, just transplanted at the bottom of the ocean—Brady wants to destroy the creature and the ship; scientist Merrill wants to study it. And, yes—there's lots and lots of talking.

In fact, the first 30 minutes are pretty slow going, and the Arthur C. Pierce script is heavy on yapping and exposition about the dark secret shared by Brady and Road (they served together on a submarine, and left several crewmembers locked in a chamber that was taking in water). The low budget and fast shooting schedule also show through at times—the miniature saucer and sea life, for example, are well-built but poorly filmed; set next to normal sized plants and coral, they are obviously tiny.

The underwater sequences, however, are surprisingly well done for a movie with this kind of budget, likely the result of cinematographer Brink Marquard's previous experience on the TV series *Sea Hunt*. But while they are pretty to look at, the film is padded with endless shots of divers slowly swimming from one place to another, or bounding along the ocean floor in a quick-draw man-sub. (It is fun to watch the beefy Brady struggle to squeeze himself into skin-tight scuba gear, though).

Once the monster appears, the film finally picks up the pace (a bit) as expendable crewmembers start dropping like flies, and Brady and Road finally bury the hatchet so they can work together to destroy the alien ship. The monster really is the key selling point, here—outlandishly adorned with giant feet, bulging eyes, exaggerated scales, and DayGlo orange fins, this "thing" would have looked right at home on an episode of *Ultraman*. He's really looking, but adds a much needed dose of high camp to an otherwise tacky sci-fi fare.

The film also has a decent cast of second and third-tier players. Brady, of course, made a lot of these cheapies in the 1950s. Road was better known as a voice actor (he was Race Bannon on *Johnny Quest*), and it's nice to see veteran actor (and former Mr. Bette Davis) Merrill in a featured role. Sheree North was a busy television actress who later played Lou Grant's girlfriend on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and Kramer's mother on *Seinfeld*.

Green Hornet regular Wendie Wagner has little to do as Road's assistant/girlfriend (who is strangely more attracted to him when she finds out he killed fellow crewmen on the doomed submarine). She does get to show off her diving skills. In addition to acting, Wagner also worked as a stunt double on *Sea Hunt* and *The Aquanauts*.

Also aboard: Creeping Terror starproducer William Thourby as a doomed crew member, and the prolific James Hong as a stereotypical Chinese cook (always accompanied by his pet parrot).

Destination Inner Space was shot back-to-back with *Castle of Evil* (also featuring Brady) in just 14 days using a two-camera technique (more common to live TV production at the time). The films were the first two productions from United Pictures Corporation, a company set up by director Lyon, producer Earle Lyon (no relation), banker Edmund Baumgarten, and was backed by Canadian oil interests. While the company initially planned to sell cheap color films directly to television, the nine features made by UPC over three years were all ultimately distributed theatrically as well.

Destination is one of the more interesting UPC films, and despite all the padding, it's worth a look for the underwater work, the fantastic fish monster, and Paul Dunlap's score (which includes familiar cues from films like *Invisible Invaders*).

Very few UPC titles were released on video, so while the Cheezy Flicks disc is far from perfect, fans of low-budget sci-fi will at least finally have a chance to watch it. The full-frame presentation is a little soft but otherwise serviceable, with occasional dirt and scratches in the print.

The disc also includes some vintage concession stand advertisements, and trailers for other Cheezy titles (including *The Day of the Trifids*, *Horrors of the Black Museum*, and *The Monster and the Ape*).



UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES

Directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul
(2010) Strand Releasing Blu-ray / DVD

With *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul reaffirms his status as one of the world's most potent, living filmmakers working today. While Weerasethakul (referred to affectionately by fans and critics simply as "Joe" for convenience sake) has already proven his cinephile mettle by garnering awards at Cannes via his previous films *Tropical Malady* and *Blessful Yams*, *Uncle Boonmee* has cemented his status by winning the prized Palme d'Or at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival. Instantly beloved by critics, *Uncle Boonmee* further explores themes of identity, spirituality, transformation, and nature, that have consistently appeared in the Thai director's filmography thus far.

The tale itself begins quite simply, the titular character, a Thai farmer on the verge of complete kidney failure, assembles what little family he has left to assist him during his final days on Earth. Upon the arrival of his sister-in-law and nephew, strange occurrences begin manifesting deep within the jungle that Boonmee's farm occupies. One night during dinner, the spirit of his deceased wife Huay suddenly materializes. Aware of Boonmee's condition, she wishes to provide aid to her husband before his life ends. Interestingly, while her appearance generates an initial shock, Huay's presence is greeted with joy and interest by Boonmee and family.

Unlike many Western films, which would view such a visit as an ominous intrusion, Joe treats this occasion with respect and appreciation—less a warning but rather a homecoming. Another unlikely visitor arrives in the form of Boonmee's long-lost son Boonsong. Transformed into a forest-dwelling creature (due to his fascination and later dalliance with a monkey spirit), Boonsong also recognizes his father's dwindling mortality, and wishes to help aid the transition into a new existence. As Boonmee contemplates his impending death, as well as the possibility of his soul's continued existence, he begins relieving himself of his worries and banal duties to prepare his mind and soul to move forward.

Many reviewers and commentators have referred to *Uncle Boonmee*'s general tone and atmosphere as more akin to dreams than film. This assessment is certainly fair. Weerasethakul is less interested in constructing a tight, linear narrative with formulaic characters than he is with using cinema itself as a means to communicate with, and explore higher notions of existence. The interaction between spirits and the living is treated without fanfare in this world—indeed one senses the director's aim is to showcase the spirit world as one that operates in parallel with that of our own, so that visitations are not seen as intrusions, but mere points of intersection between multiple, parallel realities.

Weerasethakul himself has noted in interviews that his aim with this particular film was to explore the mingling of souls between all forms of life, be they human, animal, plant, or, even ghost. This hybridization is most clearly evident through Boonsong. Transformed into a man-beast with glowing red eyes, and covered in flowing black hair, the character's initial introduction generates foreboding, especially via his eyes. However, once his identity is revealed, and tale of rebirth shared, he comes to represent the blending of man and animal as each recognizes their lines of separation, and deliberately erases them. Metaphorically, this may represent the need for humanity itself to reassess its place within nature and learn to embrace it once, rather than seek its domination.

It is important to note that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is the final piece of a larger, multimedia project that Joe has toiled over for the past two years. Collectively known as *Primitive*, the collection of short films and installation videos, photographs, and accompanying book, explores the Isan region of North-East Thailand. A remote province that has witnessed military and political clashes in recent times, *Primitive* contextualizes Isan as a metaphor for Thailand's current political rumblings and transitions. While *Uncle Boonmee* makes allusions to the growing nationalistic fervor late in the film, politics itself does not dominate the overall work.

Ultimately, the film is about how to face endings, be they a way of life or life itself. For this home video release's special features, distributor Strand Releasing has included a helpful video interview with the director himself, as well as deleted scenes, trailers for Strand's other Weerasethakul titles, and other recent Strand releases. For the uninitiated, *Uncle Boonmee* is a great introduction to the overall tone and cinematic world view of Apichatpong Weerasethakul. His oeuvre is definitely acquired taste that requires patience, but it ultimately awards those adventurous enough to embrace this man's unique vision.



Brian Allright

Todd Korman

THE COLOSSUS OF NEW YORK

Directed by Eugene Lourie
(1958) Olive Films DVD

Olive Films presents the first official DVD release of a Paramount production which featured a most impressive cinematic automaton, but which never quite scaled the heights of the classics of its era.

Dr. Jeremy Spenser (*The Wild, Wild West's* Ross Martin) is a genius humanitarian scientist who has been awarded a prestigious international prize (it isn't actually named, but he goes to Geneva to pick it up) on the cusp of his greatest breakthrough in the field of alleviating the problem of world hunger. Unfortunately, immediately on his return, he's killed in a freak accident, leaving behind his wife Anne (Mala Powers) and young son Billy (Charles Herbert). But Jeremy's father William (Otto Kruger) refuses to let go: insisting that the world cannot do without his son's genius, he secretly preserves Jeremy's still-living brain, eventually persuading his reluctant other son Henry (John Banerjee) to utilize his expertise in automation in order to construct a robotic framework through which Jeremy's brain can continue his good work. If only the elder Spenser had listened to his colleague Professor Carrington (Robert Hutton), who had previously opined that a mind without a living body would cease to have a soul...

The artificial body (now portrayed by Ed Wolff, explaining Martin's relatively low billing for such a crucial role), the tormented brain ("Jeremy" makes it very clear from the beginning that he's extremely unhappy with his new situation, but allows William to convince him—at least temporarily—to continue with the project) and the question of the soul place *The Colossus of New York* squarely in the company of *Frankenstein*, and that, in itself, is a perfectly fine and worthy theme to tackle. However, the film goes on to compromise itself by invoking 1939's *Son of Frankenstein* a little too directly when the Colossus (never actually called by that name in the film) defies orders and makes contact with young Billy (right down to the line "Gosh, are you a real giant?"). Far more interesting is the concept that has Jeremy's brain, deprived of all five scientific senses, develop a powerful sixth sense which allows him to mentally follow his various family members whenever he pleases. Couple that with the loss of true humanity, and eventually hindsight suggests that perhaps it wasn't the very best idea in the world to equip the eyes of the Colossus with radioactive death rays...

Okay, that's one plot hole, and thinking about it only makes it worse. Would a genius brain find itself truly unable to jury-rig a method of reaching its own self-destruct switch if that was what it really wanted? Since the Colossus was never meant to leave the lab, why (never mind how) did Henry render it waterproof? (Well, as director Lourie had previously given us *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* and would move on to *The Giant Behemoth* and *Gorgo*, he probably found the seeping of some artificial "underwater" footage irresistible, so I guess I just answered my own question). But that's not what counts in the end—what viewers want to see is the Colossus finally "losing it" and making its way to the United Nations, and the film certainly delivers where it counts. Lourie also strives to make the low-budget production stand out in other departments: the emphasis on humanitarian/spiritual philosophy is given more than cursory attention, and the mood is set by an unusually elegant title sequence (the image of the U.N. building is set to a grim piano score by Van Cleave as the titles themselves reflect off the waters as they rise from the surface). In the end, *The Colossus of New York* relies a bit too much on material both overly familiar and illogical (even in the context of fantasy) to rank as classic science-fiction, but the innovations it does possess keep it entertaining and ultimately worthwhile.

Shane M. Dullmann

RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS STORY

Directed by Jalmari Helander
(2010) Oscilloscope Laboratories Blu Ray/DVD combo



Rare Exports is a Finnish film about a giant, killer Santa Claus and his horde of feral elves. Sounds great, doesn't it? Lurid, exploitative? Well... sorry to disabuse you of that notion, but *Rare Exports* is actually a rather family-friendly (some profanity and some old-man nudity aside) fantasy-comedy with an intriguing premise, superb production values and impressive location shooting in snowy Norway (not Finland—director Jalmari Helander said Norway had the mountainous landscape he wanted).

Rare Exports follows two short films, made in 2003 and 2005, which set up the basic idea of a race of feral old men who are captured and trained to become Santa Clauses, then exported around the world. Both of the shorts were essentially one-joke pictures with no real plot or character development. The feature version is a prequel which explains, expands and elaborates on the original premise; an actual plot is concocted and, even more importantly, the protagonists are multi-dimensional characters we know and care about.

Shortly before Christmas, young Pietari and his friend Juuso spy on a group of workers excavating a large pit on a nearby mountain. Later, when the local reindeer herd is wiped out—apparently by wolves from across the Russian border—Pietari, his father Rauno, and Rauno's friends Armo and Piipainen visit the mountain to demand compensation from the construction company, believing a hole in the site's fence allowed the lupine intruders access (Pietari is stricken with guilt, since he was the one who cut the fence).

No one can be found, but Pietari discovers a computer image of the pit, showing an amorphous figure enclosed in a mass of ice. Pietari researches the "true story of Santa Claus," and learns the legendary figure's original purpose was to punish naughty children (whipping them, boiling them in a pot, etc.) not deliver gifts to good kids. A strange, silent, bearded old man is trapped by Rauno, who decides to ransom this "Santa Claus" to the multinational company as compensation for their dead livestock. However, Rauno and his friends learn this isn't Santa Claus, but rather one of his "elves"—hundreds more suddenly appear, threatening the Finns. Santa Claus himself is still encased in a block of ice (two gigantic horns protruding from the mass suggest his enormous size). All the local children have been kidnapped by the elves, and will receive their punishment from Santa as soon as the ice thaws. Pietari rises to the occasion, not to save Christmas, but to save the town's children from Father Christmas.

The central figure of *Rare Exports* is Pietari (Onni Tommila), still young enough to carry around a favorite stuffed animal and believe in the legendary Santa Claus, yet old enough to be entrusted with a rifle, and to concoct a plan to prevent the real, evil Santa Claus from being unleashed on the world. The interactions between Pietari and his father, as well as the slightly-older Juuso, are completely believable, helped in no small measure by the script and performances. The Christmas Eve sequence, as Pietari and his father silently mourn the missing person in their life (Pietari's mother, presumably dead), is understated but effective and affecting.

Rauno, Armo, and Piipainen are the other main characters in the film, and they function as a semi-comic trio, arguing among themselves in a good-natured manner, but cooperating when necessary. Presumably they're meant to represent the no-nonsense, indomitable Finnish spirit, stubbornly dealing with whatever adversity man or nature throws their way. They may curse or complain, and maybe they aren't the "sharpest knives in the drawer," but they don't panic and they don't back down, even when confronted by a horde of angry "elves" and a monstrous, ice-bound Santa Claus.

Rare Exports doesn't have a low-budget, "independent" look (neither did the short films, which were actually made by another, established commercial production company); the widescreen photography is superb, the special effects are fine (although for one would like to have seen the giant, evil Santa in action), and the sound, music, production design, etc., are all top-notch. While this is Helander's first feature credit, he has extensive experience making shorts, commercials, and so on, and shows no hesitation in his directorial choices. The film is paced quite well, building suspense and mystery gradually, then shifting into high gear in the last section, parallel-cutting between events in high action-film style.

There are, as always, a few minor flaws, mostly plot holes which aren't sutured up and/or inconsistencies and unexplained aspects (to pick one: isn't it odd that Pietari just happened to have books in his house which explained the history of the Santa Claus legend? Did he stop off at the village library? His father is the local butcher, not a scholar, so it hardly seems likely he'd have an old book in his house debanking the "Coca Cola" Santa Claus image, doesn't it?). However, these don't detract from the film in any serious way.

It should be noted, however, that the original short films raised expectations of a gorier, louder, more traditional monster film, and some viewers may feel misled. *Rare Exports* retains the black humor and the basic, twisted premise of the shorts, but goes in a different direction: Pietari's quest to earn his father's approval, his fear of being judged "naughty," his transition from childhood to adolescence—although the viewer isn't bludgeoned with them, these underlying themes are clearly in evidence.

Don't see *Rare Exports* expecting a tale of wild killer Santas ravaging an isolated Finnish village. Instead, expect dry humor, interesting characters, impressive locations, an original premise, good performances, slick production values and effects, and a fair amount of excitement and suspense.

David Wilt

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

Directed by Michael Reeves
Odeon Entertainment Blu-ray (UK import)

At the end of the sixties the world had changed significantly and was in a very different place than where it had begun at the advent of the decade. The 'Peace & Love' generation had started a movement whose impact and free-spirited ideologies were felt around the globe (in turn, musical 'flair' opened on Broadway in 1968). The Vietnam War waged on the thin edge of the edge, with public support for the conflict souring dramatically after the revelation of the My Lai massacre came to public light in 1969. Civil rights champion Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in '68, as was Robert F. Kennedy and an attempt was made on the life of pop culture icon Andy Warhol. Meanwhile the Black Panther movement and the anonymous Zodiac Killer became household names, as did Charles Manson after the murder of Roman Polanski's wife, Sharon Tate, in 1969.

On a more positive note, and looking towards the arts: Led Zeppelin performed their first live gig in '68 and The Beatles released their famous 'White Album'. Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey made its theatrical debut in Washington and *Planet of the Apes* opened the following day. British network Thames Television commenced transmission in London, whilst *Oliver!* took out Best Picture at the '68 Academy Awards. But most tellingly, a little underground movement in cinema (that came to be known as the 'splatter film' come the eighties) started to emerge from the drive-ins and permeate its way into the mainstream. Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) shocked audiences with its graphic violence, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) rocked the world with its stark, documentary style and, 'across the pond' (as they say) Michael Reeves unleashed a brutal take on the English tradition of Gothic Horror that was the antithesis of all that had come before it.

Opening in 1945 during the early years of the First English Civil War (1642-1651), which would see the United Kingdom split by a clear division between north and south, Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968) follows the heavily theatricalised travails of lawyer Matthew Hopkins (Vincent Price) and his assistant, John Stearne (Robert Davies), as they ply their lucrative (and sordid) trade in witch-hunts across East Angles. Riding into the township of Brandon, Suffolk, Hopkins and Stearne's charge therein is to determine the unnatural associations of local clergyman, Reverend John Lowes (Rupert Davies). Subjecting the priest to all manner of torture and degradation in their efforts to force a confession from him, Hopkins soon finds Lowes' daughter Sara (Hilary Dwyer) offering herself to him in desperation to spare her father. When word of the atrocities of Brandon reach Sara's fiancé, soldier Richard Marshall (Ian Ogilvy), he temporarily deserts his post to seek revenge against the man who would see his father-in-law handed a death sentence and his betrothed's reputation tarnished.

Sourced from the 1966 novel by Ronald Bissett, itself a fictionalised account of historical facts (key change being the elevation of Hopkins from a 24-year old lawyer of questionable qualifications to that of an experienced bard in his fifties), *Witchfinder General* has gone on to become an acknowledged classic of the horror genre as well as Reeves' long-lasting legacy to British cinema. In much the same manner in which George Romero had outpaced American cinema audiences with the cold, black & white documentary aesthetic and graphic violence of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Reeves grounded his historical horror in a harsh, brutal realism hitherto unseen in British cinema that would redefine English genre filmmaking into the next decade. Essentially a Western (bad guy rides into town and causes a ruckus; hero takes up arms to run him out of town once the villain's amoral indiscretions have hit close to home) dressed up as an Historical Thriller, aside from the brutality of its violence, Reeves' film is as fiercely a commercial venture as any contemporary thriller one might engage. And that's perhaps focal to what has allowed the film to stand the test of time instead of being consigned to the dusty vaults of history per much of Tigon's remainder B-movie programmes.

Paramount to the film's historical standing is the central grandiose, chilling performance of horror icon Vincent Price as the witchfinder himself, Matthew Hopkins. Although much has been made over the years of the behind-the-scenes clashes between Reeves and his American star, who was foisted upon him by co-financier American International Pictures, had the young director had his way and secured his favored thespian for the role (Donald Pleasence) there is no doubt in this viewer's mind that the production would never have endeared itself to a global audience the way it did under Price's reign. Whilst Pleasence was undoubtedly a great character of his generation, he was never the kind of established 'name' that held weight with international audiences the way Price had come to be revered from his work with Roger Corman in the successful Edgar Allan Poe adaptations (at least, not until John Carpenter's *Halloween*, 1978), had made him a household name a decade later. Price's performance within the film is one of measured intensity, cruel and calculated, where the documented frictions between the 57-year old star and his 24-year old director obviously drew out the finest in the seasoned veteran for a role that went on to be afforded the accolade of a career highpoint. Indeed, Price's characterisation is on a par with his perverse and unsettling rendition of Prospero in Corman's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), a role that had, until *Tigon* successor, been the benchmark for the sinister heights the actor was capable of within the limited range of the horror genre.

Of course, one actor alone does not an ensemble piece make, and Price is supported by a close-knit troupe of British talent and newcomers: Reeves' long-time friend, and regular leading man, Ian Ogilvy (who would go on to replace Roger Moore as Simon Templar in ITC's TV series *Return of the Saint*, 1976-1979) makes for a

dashing, handsome, and compulsively determined hero as Richard Marshall. Television actress Hilary Dwyer (*The Oblong Box*, 1968) is equal parts sweeping romantic lead, and fragile heroine, in her big screen debut as the fiancée of Ogilvy's Marshall and the late Robert Russell (*Bedazzled*, 1967) is an authentically grimy and sordid opportunist as Hopkins' right-hand man, Stearne. Rupert Davies (*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, 1965) and Patrick Wymark (*Blood on Satan's Claw*, 1970) also appear in supporting roles, as Rev Lowes and Oliver Cromwell (respectively). Handsomely photographed by John Coquillon (*Straw Dogs*, 1971) and beautifully scored by Paul Ferns (who appears in the film under the alias 'Morris Jar', a nod to French composer Maurice Jarre who had scored Lawrence of Arabia, 1962) Reeves' film comes together as a finely woven tapestry of excellent performances, blood and thunder horror, and faux-historical damnation.

When it came to the film's release, much as had prevailed from initial script stages, there was serious trepidation and concern as to how the

BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) would receive the film, considering the stark realism of its horrendous violence. Having fallen into money through the good fortune of an inheritance, Reeves counted head BBFC censor, John Trevelyan, as one of his distant relations. Thus, Reeves was understandably abhorred when a list of required cuts, in line with legislative policy of the era, was handed to him and the producers to allow the film a release in the UK with an X rating. Though totalling less than two minutes once completed (the spiking of Rev Lowes, torture of accused witch Elizabeth Clark in the town square, Sara's torture and Hopkins' eventual demise were all markedly reduced), the cuts dulled what had been an unrelenting attack on the sadism of the period. In the UK, and many territories abroad, these cuts remained in place throughout history until a hodge-podge patchwork of the film from varying elements was assembled decades later. In the US, the film was surprisingly released completely intact, however, AIP head James H. Nicholson retitled the film *The Conqueror Worm* (as well as added recitation of the eponymous poem, from 'Ligeia', by Price over the opening and closing credits) in an attempt to link it with the company's earlier, extremely successful Edgar Allan Poe adaptations by Roger Corman.

One can only wonder, had he not died in 1969 at the age of 25 of an accidental drug overdose whilst in preparation on his next project, *The Oblong Box* (handed to Gordon Hessler and completed later the same year), what might have become of Michael Reeves and his successive career Reeves, much like his American counterpart Romero, was a filmmaker able to invest his work with a strong social and historical commentary (and context) while delivering engagingly commercial results. Although ultimately his swansong, *Witchfinder General* stands, as much today as when it was released, a damning indictment on the hypocrisy and widespread immoral corruption that goes hand-in-hand with the machinations of countries at war with themselves. It also stands as perhaps the pinnacle of cinematic achievement for all parties involved, most notably Price who won much acclaim for his performance in what would go on to become an introduction for future generations (yours truly included) to the great man's work. Arguably as relevant today as when it was released, at a time of social and political upheaval, as well as a critically unpopular international conflict (the Vietnam War), Reeves' work remains one of the great, and confronting, entries in a genre oft-derided by critics yet embraced by audiences worldwide. Outside the accepted classics of the age, *Witchfinder General* is assuredly one of the finest achievements in horror of the sixties and a landmark entry within its genre.



This brings us, coincidentally, to the present. For years, excepting MGM Home Entertainment's superb R1 DVD (released in 2005), *Witchfinder General* had been treated poorly throughout the majority of its home video incarnations (the less said about Redemption's UK efforts to restore the film from a jumble of sources the better). Come 2010, all of that changed once English distributor Odeon Entertainment released an All-Region Blu-ray into the marketplace. Odeon's High Definition release, sourced from MGM's uncut HD master, offers the film in a presentation that is the best the film has ever looked on home video. However, Odeon didn't just stop there, as they could have for a small independent label, but instead produced a comprehensive special edition disc. Also included is an informative audio commentary by Benjamin Halligan and Mark of the Dowl (1969) director Michael Armstrong, which, for newcomers to the film, furnishes a wealth of background on the production as well as historical context to the film. Additionally, the Michael Reeves episode ("Blood Beast") of Pete Tombs' television forerunner to his Mondo Macabro video label, "Eurotica" (1999), is on hand alongside the "Witchcraft" episode of Bryan McNamery's Anglia TV series "Bloody Crimes" (2002). If that weren't enough, Reeves' early short film *Intrusion* is retained for posterity, as are the more risqué export takes (shot by producer Louis Hayward for European release), the opening/closing credits from AIP's *The Conqueror Worm* version and the film's original British theatrical trailer. Saving the best for last, the most marvelous piece of ephemera that Odeon have unearthed is Price's wonderful and frightfully funny 1984 appearance on Michael Aspel's UK talk show *Aspel & Company*; the ten minute segment (culled from co-guests Dudley Moore and pop-singer Lulu) is a true treasure for fans and shows Price at his witty, eloquent and midlife best, opposite a sometimes overwhelmed host. But simply, this is one Blu-ray that "no home should be without", whether you're a serious student of genre cinema or a simple fan of Price's work, and is essential viewing.

With thanks to Richard Owen for his assistance in sourcing Sam Hoyle's BBC4 radio-play "Vincent Price & The Horror of the English Blood Beast", an excellent dramatization of the film's many production hurdles that formed much of the historical background for this review.

Editor's note: Although *Witchfinder General* is a region free Blu-ray, some of the film's extra features are presented in PAL format, and will not play on domestic Blu-ray players.

Michael Thomason

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HOUSE OF THE WOLF MAN
Directed by Eben McGarr
(2009) Taurus Entertainment DVD

There's one thing you have to say about labors of love. The people who put them together have their heart and intentions in the right place, they try to get every single detail perfect, then offer it to like-minded people to enjoy, and protect as one would a baby bird plucked from its nest.

That out of the way—*House of the Wolf Man* is a complete disaster from the get-go. A low-budget independent feature that tries to replicate classic Universal horror, the filmmakers came up with some great sets and atmospheric black-and-white cinematography, along with some disaff elements cobbled together with an unworkable script. *House of the Wolf Man*, for all of its professional gloss is as exasperating and unpleasant as the most amateur shot-on-video crapfest.

The minimal story: five characters, all recognizable from previous "old dark house" thrillers of the 1930s and 1940s are gathered at a gothic castle for the resting of the will. They include a Hemingway-esque man of action (Jim Thelma) and a sexy, evil brunette (Cheryl Rhodes). They are presided over by an unsympathetic host (Ron Chaney, grandson of Lon Chaney Jr.) and a mute butler. As the characters struggle to find out who stands to benefit from the will, there's lots of talk that doesn't further the story. The running time listed on various websites has *House* listed at 81 minutes, my screener ran a few minutes short of that. *House of the Wolf Man* is over an hour old before the first monster shows up. The titular *Wolf Man* arrives too late in the evening for a manly fist fight with the Frankenstein monster, when Dracula—not mentioned or even alluded to prior to his sudden appearance—shows up with his snarling vampire bides.

In short, four characters of the original five are killed in a matter of minutes (after the slim plotline took great pains to introduce them with scenes of talk and more talk), the fate of the surviving cast member is left unresolved and the film—just ends. It's as if the producers just ran out of film.

As an homage, *House of the Wolf Man* adopts all the superficial aspects of the classic American horror film without an idea as to why these films continue to work so well. Filmmakers can keep the monster off-screen in a bid to generate suspense and expectation, but during these lulls, something needs to occur. No classic monster fan would accept any film where the creature doesn't make an appearance in the first hour of the running time. Universal horror, even at its lowest, such as *She Wolf of London* (1946) has lots of dandy rendered attack scenes woven throughout the story, even if it eventually boils down to a non-supernatural cop-out ending.

For the sake of comparison, I also screened *Lost Skeleton of Cadaver's* Larry Blamire's *Dark and Stormy Night* (2009), another recent send-up of "Cat and Canary" type thrillers. *Night* likewise features a Hemingway-esque man of action and a crazy old woman kept in the attic, played this time for laughs. Blamire's outing had some chuckles to be found along the way, mostly built on the wild plot contrivances found in films of this period.

Overall, *Dark and Stormy Night* is a parody of a type of film that had already been relegated to self-parody. *House of the Wolf Man* deserves some recognition for trying to revisit the genre straight-up, but as mentioned earlier, there's little reason to "wolf" this film down. Read a book instead!

Greg Goodsell



INSIDIOUS
Directed by James Wan
(2010) Film District Blu-ray/DVD

Insidious is "brought to you" by the creators of the *Saw* franchise and the *Paranormal Activity* franchise. These series are both essentially composed of repeated films based on a single premise, or in other words, remakes of themselves. Is it any wonder, therefore, that *Insidious* recycles ideas from at least half a dozen earlier movies?

I walked to the preview screening of *Insidious* this spring; I'd like to have asked a few questions of producer-writer Leigh Whannell and director James Wan, such as: "doesn't anyone in Hollywood have any new ideas anymore? Do you enjoy *Palladium*, *The Exorcist*, *The Amityville Horror* and *Paranormal Activity* so much that you felt compelled to pay tribute to these films by borrowing large chunks of their plots?"

Is the scene in *Insidious* in which a ghostbuster-medium wears a sort of gas mask as she communicates with the great beyond a reference to *The Devil Commands* (1941)? Oh, and *Mexico's El mundo de los muertos* (1968)—ever see that? Just asking...

Insidious features yet another young, upwardly-mobile family (teacher husband Josh, composer wife Renai, three young children) in an amazing house they probably shouldn't be able to afford. However, it's not sky-high mortgage payments that threaten their abode, it's a pesky pollardist who opens locked doors (setting off the alarm system, how annoying), hides books, and so forth. Oldest child Dalton (Dalton) is "imaginative" (a bad sign: ghosts pick on the sensitive ones); after a tumble in the attic, he falls into a coma which has medical science baffled. More bumps and thrumps and lurking ghostly figures and—for a change—the family does the logical thing and moves out. Finally, people in a horror film who don't act like complete idiots when confronted with perplexing and possibly dangerous phenomena. This, at least, is refreshing.



But as luck would have it, "it's not the house that's haunted . . . it's your son," says helpful ghostbuster Elise. Seems Dalton's astral body goes wandering about the cosmos while he's asleep, and this time he's blundered into "The Further," as Elise has dubbed the purgatory of lost souls—and he can't get out. Now, all manner of evil spirits are lurking about, hoping to inhabit Dalton's temporarily unoccupied corpus. Dalton's dad Josh had the ability to astral-project as a boy, so he ventures into The Further to retrieve his errant son's spirit before it's . . . too late.

Insidious isn't a badly-made film at all, but the scares are all mechanical, knee-jerk reactions caused by shock-cuts, loud noises, figures popping out of cabinets, closets, and dark corners. These are effective on an immediate, visceral level, but there is very little intellectual or emotional suspense, dread, or true, existential fear generated by the plot, the situation, or the underlying ideas at its core.

The potential horror inherent in a tale of an innocent little boy trapped in (essentially) hell is only hinted at, in favor of endless scenes of his parents arguing and parapsychologists fussing with their equipment.

Everything seems so familiar. Husband doesn't believe wife's tale of odd things occurring in the house? Check. Husband sends away ghostbuster brought in by his wife? Check. Child lost in another dimension, calling for parents? Check. Screams, lights go out, furniture overturned? Check. Child possessed by a demon? Check. Combination of science and the supernatural, neither one especially satisfying? Check. Last-second twist and an unhappy ending? Check.

Fully half the running time of *Insidious* is spent just setting up the premise of "Dalton gets stuck in the dark dimension." Then, the focus of the film suddenly goes from "haunted house hinks" to "rescue quest," cutting off the first and short-changing the latter. Josh's visit to The Further to save his son is confusing and less than awe-inspiring. Admittedly, *Insidious* looks pretty darn good given its budget (under \$2 million), but the lack of resources really shows in these climactic sequences, which are basically just dark and might as well have been shot in a warehouse or your grandmother's basement. The painted-face demons and white-faced ghosts aren't exactly examples of world-class makeup design and effects, either. Having a low budget doesn't have to mean "no imagination," but *Insidious* seems content to recycle a three-bare narrative with the fewest possible innovations and least possible effort.

Insidious is inoffensive fun. Audiences seemed to agree, as it did well at the box-office on a minuscule investment. It's not insulting to a viewer's intelligence, and the acting, direction, etc. are slick and professional. So this isn't bad, or even a waste of time and money. But *Insidious* is by no means a seriously "scary" or imaginative film. It's disposable, by-the-numbers, rote filmmaking, enjoyed in the moment and then immediately forgotten.

Blu-ray and DVD extras include "On Set with *Insidious*," "Horror 101: the exclusive seminar," and, "*Insidious* Entitles," where we get a sneak peek at the film's creepy cast of undead characters.



David Wilt

A REFLECTION OF FEAR

Directed by William A. Fraker
(1973) Sony / Columbia m.o.d. DVD

Prolific and highly-acclaimed director of photography William A. Fraker (*Butt!*) rarely took the director's chair himself, but between the well-received *Los Marvin/Jack Palance western Monte Walsh* (1970) and the disastrous *Legend of the Lone Ranger* (1981), he took the reins of this bizarre "family dynamic" thriller which remains an obscure despite the credentials of its cast alone.

Top-billed Robert Shaw is Michael, who would like to see his wife clear to marry his new flame Anne (Sally Kellerman). In order to do this, he must make the pilgrimage to the isolated mansion of his estranged wife

Katherine (Mary Ure) and obtain a legal divorce. Katherine certainly has no reason to want Michael in her life anymore, but things still aren't quite that simple. She'll give him the divorce he needs if and only if he agrees to have absolutely no contact with young Marguerite (Sondra Locke) . . . the daughter he never knew. Katherine and caretaker Julia (Signe Hasso) can take care of her perfectly well on their own, thank you very much. But Michael has already met Marguerite during the course of the afternoon, and he can't bring himself to simply walk away from her, because something is definitely wrong with this picture—and he can sense this even without witnessing what the audience has been seeing and hearing: specifically, Marguerite carrying on intense private conversations with a doll by the name of Aaron (voiced by Gordon Anderson). And it isn't long before a burst of murderous violence changes the living arrangements of just about everyone left alive in the movie!

There's nothing wrong with the performances (Locke is especially good), but unfortunately, just about everything goes wrong in the execution. Unless you're willing to entertain the possibility that the movie is going to veer into supernatural "killer doll" territory, there scarcely seems any point in trying to keep the identity of the assailant a mystery. And while a "PG" rating could still really mean something in 1973, it couldn't be more obvious that steps were taken to tone down what had to be a much more perverse narrative in its original form. Anne correctly notes that Marguerite's interest in her father hints at moving beyond the paternal, but that idea is quickly stopped in its tracks as an otherwise unnecessary extra character is added to the mix so that somebody else can try to coax the young lady out of her shell (with the expected results). Beyond that, the climactic sequences of suspense and action fall dismally; mainly because we've all seen Robert Shaw participate in one of the greatest movie fight scenes of all time (*From Russia with Love*) and can't believe for a second that he'd be so helpless against his puny attacker (even if he didn't want to fight back, he could certainly restrain his antagonist). And finally, the twist that comes at the very end may have worked in the context of the story itself, but it's simply unbelievable (and frankly pointless) in the filmed rendition. Spoiler alert: if you don't want a hint, skip to the next paragraph. There's a reason that people are still talking about *Stepsway Camp* nearly 30 years later while this film is all but forgotten.

A *Reflection of Fear* was released on VHS many months ago on the RCA/Columbia label: its much-delayed DVD box now comes from Sony's disc-on-demand service accompanied by its theatrical trailer. The image and soundtrack are both pleasantly rendered—naturally, there are no further extras.



THE SECRET OF DORIAN GRAY

Directed by Massimo Dallamano
(1970) Raro Video DVD

Born into privilege, handsome young blonde-haired, blue-eyed student Dorian Gray (Helmut Berger) is the envy of all whom he meets and the instantaneous object of desire for multiple women. Having agreed to allow his friend Basil Hallward (Richard Todd) to paint his portrait, the resultant canvas catches the eye of wealthy socialite Henry Wotton (Herbert Lom) and his sister Gwendolyn (Margaret Lee). Against initial trepidations, as he has only just become romantically entwined with burgeoning stage actress Sybil Vane (Mara Liptshitz), Dorian allows himself to enter into the social circle of his new acquaintances and soon finds himself seduced by their charms and ideologies.

Enamored of his expanding associations and admirations, Dorian succumbs heavily to vanity, wishing for nothing more than Basil's portrait to age so that he may retain his beauty and allure. With the hedonistic lifestyle of his peers consuming him, he falls out of favour from the vibrant love he saw in Sybil and begins stretching his sexual proclivities and morals in line with high society. When news of Sybil's death reaches him, Dorian sinks deeper and deeper into wanton self-gratification and fulfilling his fantasies

However, whilst he remains youthful and desirable throughout the years, the portrait in his attic bears the ugliness and time-ravaged scars of his many, many sins.

Akin to his Irish countryman and author Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) sole published novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), has gone on from accepted literary classic to numerous silver screen incarnations. As early as 1910, a mere ten years after Wilde's death, Danish filmmaker Alex Strøm brought the allegory to the cinema screen as *Dorian Gray's Portrait*, but it wouldn't be until three decades later before the most famous of adaptations hit cinemas with Albert Lewin's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), starring Hurd Hatfield. Come the tail-end of the sixties, British film entrepreneur Harry Alan Towers took advantage of a relaxing censorship climate, and the pop-culture phenomenon of the sexual revolution, to take a fairly revisionist reworking of Wilde's memorable tome. Financed as a collaboration between his own British production house, Towers of London, and West German and Italian interests, *The Secret of Dorian Gray* (1970) breathed new life into a well-worn tale.

Directed by (Italian) former cinematographer Massimo Dallamano, who had served as Director of Photography on Sergio Leone's international hit *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) and *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) as well as helmed a heady rendition of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1969) prior, Towers' new interpretation was as much a reflection of its era as it was a more openly honest reading of Wilde's source. However, although it flirts with the more open screen permissiveness of the day, Dallamano and Marcello Caccia's screenplay is remarkably faithful to Wilde's novel, in some instances almost down to the letter. Although critically savaged on release in 1970, Dallamano's adaptation is as much a time capsule of the period in which it was birthed as Gray's portrait was a vessel that kept its protagonist eternally young. Admittedly, until Helmut Berger's (*Salon Kitty*, 1976) Dorian goes off the rails and descends into a world of decadence and debauchery, the story is picturesque and aesthetically pleasing but rather sluggish and meandering.

Yet, within Berger as Gray, Dallamano holds perhaps his greatest asset as the Austrian born actor (twenty five at the time of the film's production) is almost the epitome of Wilde's creation, a handsome and irresistible man to all who fall at his feet, irrespective of availability, age or sexual persuasion. As the "Dandy about Town," Berger is possibly one of the more eloquent Grays in screen history as, during the period, he was certainly one of the more attractive and accomplished leading men of European cinema, undoubtedly due to his work with legendary Italian director Luchino Visconti (*The Damned*, 1969). Almost as a knowing wink to the audience, Dallamano plays on Berger's (acknowledged) bisexuality by making his Gray compelling to both sexes. Mara Liptshitz (*Eugenie . . . the Story of Her Journey into Pornography*, 1970) seems almost conservative by comparison as his love interest, Sybil, but lends some resonant emotion to the narrative. Whereas veteran Herbert Lom (*Mark of the Devil*, 1969) is remarkable and imposing as the sexually ambiguous Henry Wotton, whose cultured soliloquies and free-thinking instigate him into Dorian's life, Richard Todd (*The Longest Day*, 1962), Margaret Lee (*Jess Franco's Venus in Furs*, 1969), Mara Lom (*59 Women*, 1969) and Beryl Cunningham (*Island of the Fishmen*, 1973) also appear in supporting roles.

Considered something of a cause célèbre in its day, largely through its more sexually explicit (for the era) exploration of Dorian's descent in decadence, *The Secret of Dorian Gray* retrospectively stands as a product extremely indecive of its time as well as a very "Swinging sixties" reinvention of the wheel. Obviously, for a film over forty years old, time has dulled its ability to titillate, shock or surprise and much of the sexual material on display is tamer than what contemporary audiences encounter on free-to-air television (although, it must be said, Berger's cheeky wink to a black fisherman in a public toilet at one point is hilarious sides high camp at its best). As a nostalgia piece, Dallamano's version of *Dorian Gray* is a bit of light, sometimes mildly-sexy fun, on one gets past the maudlin first act and Berger's character finally hits his stride on a debauched sexual bender. More a case of late-sixties London through the eyes of a European filmmaker than bona fide Italian cult cinema, as well as sexual fantasy for the cinema-ast from a fragmentary moment in history where such a thing hadn't really existed, *The Secret of Dorian Gray* is a pop-art artefact that should find a welcome home amongst fans of European genre cinema of its free-spirited generation.



Shane M. Dallamano

Michael Thomson

WARNER BROS. HORROR/MYSTERY DOUBLE FEATURES

FIND THE BLACKMAILER (1943) / THE SMILING GHOST (1941) / THE HIDDEN HAND (1942) / SH! THE OCTOPUS (1937) / THE MYSTERY HOUSE (1938) / THE PATIENT IN ROOM 18 (1938)

Warner Archive Collection (made on demand DVD)

WARNER BROS. HORROR/MYSTERY DOUBLE FEATURES

FIND THE BLACKMAILER (1943) / THE SMILING GHOST (1941) / THE HIDDEN HAND (1942) / SH! THE OCTOPUS (1937) / THE MYSTERY HOUSE (1938) / THE PATIENT IN ROOM 18 (1938)



I've been trying to figure how it is that I never knew until the release of the Warner Brothers Horror/Mystery Double Features box set that there existed a film with the wonderful title *Sh! The Octopus*. In fact, of the six movies in the collection, I can't recall having seen any of them previously. Either I have been terribly remiss or the titles were seldom included in Warner Brothers television distribution packages during the years, since I have a certain awareness of B mystery titles from various other studios dating from the era (late '30s to early '40s). I am inclined to believe the latter. It isn't difficult to imagine how these films were set aside and forgotten, their slight running times would have made most of them a difficult fit for television time slots—only two of the six titles top one hour in length (at 71 minutes, 1941's *The Smiling Ghost* is the grand epic of the bunch), so fitting them into a 90-minute slot would have been out of the question, while trimming them to fit a one-hour slot (with commercials) would have been awfully unfair to the films themselves (not that any program director would have given a damn about that). There was also the relative obscurity of the titles to consider: the studio probably just saw little use for them. Ah, but now the beauty of the age of DVD.

The six titles are broken down into double features over three discs. Disc one opens with *Find the Blackmailer* (1943), and titles don't come any more descriptive than that, Jerome Cowan stars as a typically glib-tongued private eye hired by politician Gene Lockhart, who is being blackmailed by someone with a talking crow. It gets a little involved, but it will suffice to say that the bird has been trained to hurl accusations at Lockhart should anything happen to its owner. With all its clichés (including Cowan's sexy secretary, whom he can't afford), the film is pretty rigid in sticking to genre formulas, but it was hardly the best first impression the collection could have made. *Sh! The Octopus*, with its light approach and skinny 55-minute running time, it's easy to digest (easy to forget, too).

The Smiling Ghost bumps things up a notch. Wayne Morris stars as an amiable lug who is very down on his luck, and so accepts an offer to make \$1,000 just for posing as the fiancé of beautiful blonde Alexis Smith for one month. Sounds like a sweet enough gig, but of course Morris doesn't get the whole story. It turns out that Smith's previous three boyfriends have each met a nasty fate (two dead, one paralyzed), and he is being used as bait to lure a jilted ex-sultor suspected of the crimes. The film has standard old dark house trappings (secret panels and passageways, for instance), and the titular phantom is actually pretty creepy. Otherwise, the characters are fairly engaging, though viewers of a PC bent will likely find Willie Best cringe-worthy as Morris' valet.

Sorry to say that *Sh! The Octopus* (1937) doesn't quite live up to its title, but then how could it? The film is a comedy that stars Allen Jenkins and Hugh Herbert as bungling cops drawn to a lighthouse on a rainy night to investigate a murder. The lighthouse, small as it is, gets very crowded as people keep showing up to get out of the rain, but it turns out that they are all there purposefully to get their hands on a "death ray formula" that is being eagerly sought by all sides. The film manages to transplant the old dark house motif to the lighthouse, with secret panels aplenty, but instead of being terrorized by some phantom killer, the group is left dodging the tentacles of a killer octopus that lives in the caverns beneath the lighthouse. Maybe you would have to catch this one in the right mood, but Jenkins and Herbert indiscriminately firing their guns aimlessly gets very tedious even in a 54-minute movie (they're not terribly funny either).

The movie does have one startling effect worth mentioning: late in the film, a kindly old woman rips off her gray-haired wig and transforms right before the viewers' eyes into a witch-like hag, her hair dark and stringy, face suddenly discolored.

And even a tooth vanishing here and there. It was a pretty ambitious bit of special effects trickery for such a little piece of entertainment. In *The Hidden Hand* (1942), wealthy Cecil Cunningham helps her brother (Milton Parsons) escape from an insane asylum, despite his being a homicidal lunatic who has been institutionalized for some ten years after committing a number of murders. Cunningham is willing to go to the trouble because she has a mad scheme of her own, and needs Parsons' help to accomplish it. Weary of her nephews and their wives leaching off her wealth and merely waiting for her to die, Cunningham invites them to the house for a weekend and then fakes her own death with the help of a crooked physician. She leaves half her estate to her secretary, and encourages the family to fight over the rest by scouring the house for it. As none of them have seen Parsons for a very long time, they don't recognize that he is masquerading as the new butler, and Cunningham intends for him to dispose of the greedy ingrates in turn as they all point an accusing finger at each other. It seems unusual for a murder mystery to clue the audience in from the get-go as to who the killer is, but the film does offer some interesting twists along the way, and it's a pretty easy 66 minutes to pass (though some sources claim it as 63 minutes). Willie Best is on hand as the family chauffeur, and he must have gotten very tired of doing the knee-knocking and running-for-cover routine. As politically incorrect as the characterization may be, it is left for Best to hurl the film's only actual racial epithet when he mumbles, "You just can't trust them Japs," while talking about an oriental kitchen worker.

Disc three closes out the collection with a pair of 1938 mysteries, both featuring author Mignon G. Eberhart's private eye Lance O'Leary. In *Mystery House*, a businessman is found shot to death after inviting his various partners up to his lodge for a weekend. As the body was discovered in a bedroom bolted from the inside, the death is officially ruled a suicide, but the man's daughter (Anne Nagel) knows better. She aims to prove her father was murdered by inviting the various suspects back again, hoping to smoke the killer out with the help of O'Leary (Dick Purcell). Once the company is assembled, no surprise that some of them start getting bumped off. Eschewing the usual rainstorms and old dark house, the snowbound lodge proves an effective setting for keeping the suspects isolated in the case. Though not comedic in nature like the previous four offerings in the set, the tone stays fairly light, and at 55 minutes, breezes by.

The concluding feature, *The Patient in Room 18*, was actually released four months prior to *Mystery House*, which makes the film's star, Patric Knowles, the original Lance O'Leary. While convalescing in a private hospital, Knowles gets involved in solving a murder that also involves the theft of \$100,000 worth of radium. Both O'Leary films co-star Ann Sheridan as Nurse Sara Keate, O'Leary's antagonistic love interest. They have the damndest exchange in *The Patient in Room 18*, and while I'm sure I heard it wrong, it goes like this:

Keate: Remember your blood pressure, big shot.
O'Leary: I promise to be back in bed in ten minutes, Keate.
Keate: (expletive)

I won't tell you what it sounds like—watch for yourself, then see what you think she says.

It's both surprising and disappointing that *Sh! The Octopus* would turn out to be the weak link in the set, but the collection is pretty solid overall. The stories and characters are generally entertaining, and genre fans will otherwise enjoy seeing familiar faces from Universal horror films of the era. Knowles would later co-star in *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), while Nagel's credits include *The Mad Doctor of Market Street* and *The Mad Monster* (both in 1942), and David Bruce, who appears in *The Smiling Ghost*, would later star in *The Mad Ghoul* (1943). The two O'Leary films also offer the chance to enjoy Ann Sheridan's classic beauty, and she seems very comfortable in the character of the sarcastic Nurse Keate.

If you like your murder in monochrome, if you like whipping rain, cracking thunder, secret passageways, wisecracking P.I.'s, and Warner's honey lambs, then this collection delivers on all fronts. It would be great if they would dust off another set of these.

Bryan L. Yeatter



THE MATRIMONY

Directed by Teng Huatuo

Palissades Tartan Asia Extreme (Blu-ray / DVD)



On the very day that he plans to propose, Shanghai cinematographer Shen Junchu's (Leon Lai) world is shattered when his lover, Xu Manli (Fan Bing Bing), is killed before his eyes in an horrific traffic accident. A year on from that tragic event, Junchu has retreated into himself and become sullen and effusive within his arranged marriage to embroiderer Sansan (Rene Liu). Sharing their stately country mansion with housekeeper Rong Ma (Xu Songzi), the couple go through the motions of a married life that leaves Sansan's heart torn. With her husband looked away in his room rights, Sansan soon finds herself acutely aware of strange sounds and an unearthly presence about their home.

Eventually the source of Sansan's ghostly chills reveals itself, and she is beset by the spirit of Junchu's former flame, radio presenter Manli. Manli confesses that she is heartbroken at Junchu's brooding preoccupation with the past and offers Sansan the chance to save her marriage. Through the spiritual possession of Sansan, Manli hopes to reach into the fiber of his soul and awaken his heart. Once her husband's dormant passions are rekindled, Sansan becomes enchanted at the connection that has returned to their lives. However, Manli harbors an ulterior motive in her ghostly guidance and Aunt Rong, a spiritualist, sees she must fight dark forces to save Sansan's mortal soul.

With the flood of ghost-themed horror films that came out of Hong Kong, and surrounding South East Asian regions, in the wake of the Pang Brothers' hugely successful *The Eye* (2002), it seemed only a matter of time before Mainland Chinese filmmakers would adopt (and adapt) the aesthetics of the genre for one of the largest captive audiences in Asia. However, producing horror films in the Mainland, where strict censorship controls passed the edict that "wronged spirits and violent ghosts, monsters, demons, and other inhuman portrayals, strange and supernatural storytelling for the sole purpose of seeking terror and horror" were prohibited from on-screen screens under a blanket ban. Come the 2008 Beijing Olympics, further measures were taken to purge "offending" genre materials from the marketplace. But restrictions were in place, with reference to cinema and the spirit world, long before that event brought the world to China's doorstep.

As far back as 2003, where Hong Kong production company Universe Entertainment mounted a remake of classic Shaw Brothers thriller *The 5 Billion Dollar Legacy* (1969) in partnership with Mainland studios Shen Xi Film and China Film, filming in Guangdong and Shanghai under the title *The Death Curse* (2003) with Hong Kong pop-princesses Twins (Charlene Choi and Gillan Chung), screenwriters found themselves reshaping the supernatural element of their production to suit Mainland approval. Likewise, with Mainland production *The Matrimony* (2007), and operating under the supposition that ghosts and spirits cannot be seen to exist without rationalisation, director Teng Huatuo (*Sky of Love*, 2003) and writers Zhang Jialu (*Delectable Dee* and the *Mystery of the Phantom Flame*, 2010) and Yang Qianling (*Inner Secrets*, 2002) craft a ravishing tale of unearthly love whilst keeping it knowingly within the boundaries of its Chinese censorship constraints. Obviously, this means that the narrative has been tailored towards what is permissible, with 1930s Shanghai as the story's backdrop (i.e. before the Cultural Revolution) and bookend framing that places events clearly within the imagination over having actually taken place. Surprisingly, neither of these censorship concessions damage or hinder the central story, as it is the triangular romance between Junchu, Sansan and Manli that takes center stage throughout.

Headlining the rather opulent production are Hong Kong Cantopop superstar Leon Lai (*Fire of Conscience*, 2010) and award-winning Taiwanese actress Rene Liu (*Hot Summer Days*, 2010), with abetted support from popular Mainland actress Fan Bing Bing (*Shinjuku Incident*, 2009). Even back in the nineties, as one of the "Four Heavenly Kings" (a pop-culture label he shared with singing sensations Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau and Aaron Kwok), Leon Lai tended to play second-fiddle to his more popular performing artists and herein, whilst having grown as an actor, still exhibits something of that boyish second-tier talent that he was all those years ago. Initially the vacant, blank-state many of us have been accustomed to over the years, Lai really only turns on the charm once his character warms up in the second act. On the other hand, co-star Liu is her usual exemplary self, arising from timid mouse through radiant housewife as only she can, in turn virtually carrying the entire production on the back of her supple performance. Fan also engages a fine turn, although her range is limited by the material which binds her between eerie apparition and gorgeous memory.

Complimenting helmer Teng's accomplished direction, which manages to elicit the quiet beauty of the romantic aspects against some tensely executed "horror" sequences, are a bevy of imported Hong Kong technicians and production crew. Veteran costume designer Dora Ng (*Bodyguards and Assassins*, 2009) shows astounding attention to detail, recreating the look of '30s Shanghai exquisitely, which is augmented by the efforts of art director Feng Ligang (*Umbralla*, 2010) whose design deftly enhances and heightens the overall tone and beauty of the production. Capturing all of this finely detailed work is cinematographer Mark Lee (*After Six Our Eerie*, 2006) who, with over thirty years experience in the industry inclusive of collaborations with Wong Kar Wai, Sylvia Chang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, imbues almost all of his photography with a majesty and radiance unparalleled. Debuting composer Lee Siu-yin's lyrical orchestral score adds a wistful, touching melody to the narrative that brings out the emotions of the piece as well as injects '30s period flavor where required.

Far from the sort of production that typified the "Asia Extreme" catch-phrase marketing label at its peak, "Teng Huatuo's *The Matrimony* is best likened to a sweeping, romantic Chinese variation on the themes established by such cinematic works as *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) or even *Ghost* (1990). It is an elegant, richly designed and photographed tale of love from beyond the grave that rarely bothers itself with the imagery or shock-tactic clichés of the genre, instead focusing on a triangular love story between the living and the dead and the efforts of a woman desperately in love with her husband and the lengths she would go to see that love reacquainted. In essence, *The Matrimony* is much akin to a storybook (or, in this reference, radio-play) of love and loss, hopes and regrets that plays out with just a hint of the supernatural for little more than its intrinsic fantasy element and concession towards commercial trends. There is a captivating quality of understated magic within Teng's romantic fantasy and that alone sets it apart from the production-line of its more widely known peers, which makes it something of an anomaly and just unique enough to recommend.

Michael Thomason

TORSO

Directed by Sergio Martino

(1973) Blue Underground Blu-ray



Sergio Martino's *Torso* was one of a flood of Italian gialli released in the early 1970s, but one with a reputation as a groundbreaking proto-slasher thanks to endorsements from the likes of Eli Roth and Quentin Tarantino, both of whom cite the last 20 minutes of the film as a high point in 1970s horror.

Blue Underground has now released the film for its third go-round on disc, this time as a Blu-ray. Although the film was previously available from both Blu and Anchor Bay, the new edition was struck from the original negative, and includes both the uncut original English and Italian director's cut of the film, which originally boasted the typically wordy Italian title *I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale* (*Bodies Bear Traces of Carnal Violence*).

Does *Torso* live up to its hype? Sort of. A group of university co-eds are targeted by the standard ski-masked, black-gloved stranger so prevalent in Italian thrillers. Police ineffectually investigate, and potential suspects (a friendly professor, a mysterious doctor, a creepily intense student, a perverse nurse) behave oddly while the corpses pile up. The first three-quarters of the film plod along in fairly ho-hum fashion, although the action is well-framed by Martino, and there is ample nudity on display from almost every actress in the film (save for lead Suzy Kendall, who also appeared in *The Girl with the Crystal Plume*).

The action then shifts to a country house, where Kendall and her friends have retreated to get away from the dangers of the city. Unfortunately, the mysterious killer has followed them, and what follows is a tense and inventive turn on the "girls in peril" formula, with the hobbled Kendall awakening to find herself trapped in the house with a killer who may or may not know she is even there. This final sequence, in which Kendall attempts to either escape or find help while the killer disposes of his other victims using that hackzaw so prominently featured in the poster art, is the bedrock of *Torso*'s reputation and has clearly had an impact on the work of filmmaker slashers like Roth (*Torso* actor Luc Merenda makes an appearance in *Hostel II*). Getting there, however, is a bit of a chore, particularly for anyone already familiar with this uniquely Italian blend of stalk-and-slash.

Along with an introduction by *Torso* cheerleader Roth, extras include radio and TV spots, the U.S. and international trailers (under the title *Carnal Violence*), a poster and still gallery, and an interview with director Martino ("Murders in Perugia").

Brian Albright

GARGOYLES

Directed by Bill Norton
(1972) Hen's Tooth Video DVD



Anyone who has been around long enough can tell you that there was something about TV movies in the 1970s that set them apart. If you were lucky enough to be a kid then, you would have seen some supremely bizarre television fare at an age when weariness still seemed much more a grand discovery to a young, impressionable mind. Those who were around to witness it firsthand still look back fondly on Janos Szekely (fingering people all over the streets of Las Vegas in *The Night Stalker*, Karen Black being chased relentlessly through her apartment by a homicidal dog in *Trilogy of Terror*, and Kim Darby being dragged into her furnace by a horde of demonic gremlins in *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*). It was the kind of heliocentric programming that one can hardly imagine coming from any other era, and along with the afore-mentioned titles, *Gargoyles* would place high on the list of the decade's weird TV offerings.

Originally airing on *The New CBS Tuesday Night Movies* on November 21, 1972, *Gargoyles*—for those of you unfamiliar with it—is a no-frills monster movie, which stars Cornell Wilde as an anthropologist who travels with his daughter (Jennifer Salt) to a remote tourist trap called Uncle Willie's Desert Museum. The proprietor (Woody Chambliss) shows Wilde a strange skeleton he has recovered from the desert, but loses his life shortly thereafter when reptilian monsters come calling to reclaim the bones. Wilde then becomes embroiled in helping defend the town against the gargoyles, as well as rescuing his daughter after head gargoyle Bernie Casey abducts her. Ultimately, it is more than the fate of the town or Wilde's daughter at stake, but the future of mankind and the earth, as what is occurring is the hatching of a gargoyle colony after a 500-year incubation period.

The film was the byproduct of writer Elinor Kapf's fascination with gargoyles, and a subsequent nightmare she had in which gargoyles take over the earth. Her husband Stephen Kapf (also a writer) helped her develop it into a story, and as producer Rick Rosenberg explained at the time, the made-for-TV project became something of an affectionate homage to the monster movies that ran in neighborhood theaters in the 1950s. The creatures in those old films weren't really fooling anybody, but the audience was having too much fun to care, and as Rosenberg explained, the aim of *Gargoyles* was likewise to be more entertaining than frightening. Even so, the movie has some effective moments of tension.

Shot in Carlsbad, New Mexico (including the caverns), *Gargoyles* filled a 90-minute time slot, meaning that, minus commercials, the film clocks at an efficient 74 minutes. Like other telefilms of the time, the narrative is necessarily concise, having so little time to waste, but it manages enough lead to set itself up effectively with the opening act at Chambliss' roadside attraction. Chambliss also does a superb job with his brief appearance. Grayson Hall provides an entertaining performance (a veteran of *Dark Shadows*) as an alcoholic motel owner. It's nice to see *Gargoyles* get the full DVD treatment, with a beautiful print and transfer, as well as commentary by director Bill Norton, who confesses to not having seen the film in the intervening 38 years.

A career TV director, whose credits include shows like the mid-80s revival of *The Twilight Zone*, *SeaQuest 2032*, *The Invincible Man*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and various *Law & Order* spin-offs, Norton's commentary is full of interesting details about the production, as one would expect, although it is a bit sparse at times. One thing that seems to still stick in the director's craw is the design of the gargoyle costumes, which were merely decorated wetsuits, although Norton does seem pleased by the facial make-up of the creatures. Interestingly, he credits the make-up to Stan Winston and Dick Baker, though the film itself credits Winston and Ellis Burman (Ross Wheat gets credit for the gargoyle costumes). Otherwise, Norton cringes at Salt's clichéd horror movie screams, and points out that, as a director, his use of the zoom lens tends to date the film (crane and dolly shots are preferable now, it seems).

Gargoyles is a fun—if a little—piece of entertainment worth revisiting, and other than giving a taste of more eccentric seventies television, it also has the sight of Jennifer Salt at her most delicious to recommend it.

Bryan L. Ventler

RUBBER

Directed by Quentin Dupieux
(2010) Magnet Blu-ray / DVD



A discarded tire by the side of an unnamed southwest American desert highway suddenly comes to life and begins rolling on its own volition. The tire, dubbed "Robert" in the credits, discovers it has telekinetic powers and can make animals and humans' heads explode in *Scanners* (1981) fashion. Robert rolls his merry way down the road, destroying anything that annoys or bores him, until he sees a beautiful French girl (Roxanne Mesquida) speeding away in a sportscar. Robert begins his pursuit of the jeune fille, and more bodies pile up. The authorities are helpless to do anything, as a group of spectators with binoculars watching the action high on hill, (intended to represent the movie going audience), collectively insist that the monster tire do something that makes logical sense. Police Lieutenant Chad (Stephen Spinella), working with a milquetoast accountant (Jack Plotnick), resort to drastic measures to end the crisis, until one crotch stalwart audience member in a wheelchair (played by trash film icon Wings Hauser) rolls on to the action to demand that the dog-and-pony show plays out to a satisfactory conclusion.

This conceived-in-five-seconds story is the backbone for *Rubber*, a delightful black comedy that punches holes in cinematic logic and the nature of reality in general. *Rubber* firmly belongs in the "Millennium Unreality" genre. While the subject has been tackled with grim seriousness in such fare as *The Matrix* series, *Inception* (2010), and *Memento* (2000), *Rubber* gleefully breaks the audience's nose and sends them home with a smile on their face. In an era when horror films that get a massive Internet buzz are glum descents into hopelessness and despair, *Rubber* is every bit as nihilistic—but accomplishes it all with a slap and tickle.

"It's already boring," whines one omniscient kid, watching with binoculars (not more than five minutes into the film). His passive companions agree with him, but don't budge from their perch holding on to the promise that something will happen. Starving to death, the child later grabs an exploded rabbit whose path managed to cross with Robert's. "Don't eat that, it's all fake," scolds his father. It's rare—and hilarious to see a film that so blatantly talks down to its audience in such a fashion.

For all of its sarcasm and studied cheapness, offset with breathtaking cinematography, *Rubber* does have a salient point to make. It comes in the form of a speech delivered by the deputy to the crowd with binoculars prior to the beginning of the narrative. "In the Steven Spielberg movie *E.T.* (1982), why is the alien born? No reason. In *Love Story* (1971), why do the two characters fall madly in love with each other? No reason. . . . The deputy makes a reference to the "Excellent Chambliss Massacre" and sneaks in this lethal bit of trivia. "In Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), why is the president assassinated by some stranger? No reason."

It is here that an especially wounding point is delivered: Any audience member who approaches *JFK* as an objective history lesson, without further inquiry and research, is left with a deeply biased view of American history and national character. This writer will never forget the time a young lady of 20 years of age asked him in all sincerity, "Where was World War II fought?" As the liveliest act, cinema delivers stories based on fact—that are essentially stories, rendered by very subjective artists with their own cultural agendas. Reality is bent, not unlike *Rubber*. Merely, in order to fit a two-hour time slot where the characters are not shown using the lavatory.

It's a danger inherent in all art forms, where the artist cannot, by human nature, be totally objective. William Shakespeare to the contrary, historians insist that *Richard III* was not all that bad. In the Internet age, users can now conceivably filter out all news and information that displeases them, leading to a dangerously "self-educated" populace. Adding to this crisis is the fact that most high school history courses and before the Civil War, if the overworked and underpaid instructor gets that far. *Rubber*'s very first few minutes, where sturdy looking chairs in the desert are knocked over by a slow moving car, revealing them to be flimsy paper mockups, illustrates this point in a haunting visual metaphor.

Rubber is highly recommended—however, it's certain to leave some viewers unsettled, who will denounce the film as an overly clever bonbon. Some members of the audience will leave *Rubber* exasperated and insulted, in the manner of the crowd of spectators depicted in the film. It's important to remember that cult movies are intended to be enjoyed only by select members of the audience, while sometimes alienating other viewers. One must approach *Rubber* with a good attitude and a willingness to "roll along" with its wacky premise.

The Blu-ray/DVD includes an interview with director Quentin Dupieux, as well as interview with actors Spinella, Plotnick and Mesquida.

Greg Goodshell



BURN, WITCH, BURN (A.K.A. NIGHT OF THE EAGLE)

Directed by Sidney Hayers
(1962) MGM Limited Edition Collection DVD-R



The assumption is always that the seventies was the decade of the devil. *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* spawned an army of hellish cinematic children but the hooded one was making insidious and significant inroads a decade before *Rosemary's Baby*, Hammer's *The Devil Rides Out* came at the end of the sixties but lurking in the shadows of 1962 was *Burn Witch Burn*.

Set against a British backdrop of stuffy university politics and rose-suffocated English villages, this black and white classic is very redolent of Jacques Tourneur's *Curse Of The Demon*. You could swear that this was an adaptation of an M.R. James story such as *Casting The Runes* as well. The central character is a skeptic who is in denial of supernatural forces operating around him.

It's actually adapted from a novel by American author Fritz Lieber called *Conjure Wife* and Richard Matheson had a hand in the script. Matheson is one of the only cast and crew still breathing apart from actor Peter Wyngarde (Jason King) who vanished from the public eye after being convicted of indecency with a truck driver in a public toilet in 1975. Responsible for one of the most bizarre albums ever released—*When Sex Leers Its Inquisitive Head* (1970)—he's now as hard to track down as copies of the film were before MGM decided to grant this long overdue US DVD release. Part of their Limited Edition Collection, every classic horror fan will want to add it to their film library.

After the opening titles (more of those later) we meet Wyngarde as Professor Norman Taylor. He's lecturing a class of students about superstition. He writes I DO NOT BELIEVE on the blackboard but we suspect he certainly will by the end of the feature's ninety minute running time.

Norman has success and a perfect life with his wife, Tansy, played by Janet Blair. However, she's brought a few souvenirs back from their time in Jamaica which she keeps hidden in the drawer. No, not colophane packages containing dried goods for recreational consumption, but a stash of a very different variety.

Norman discovers that Tansy has been passing the time in their cottage casting spells to provide them with the good fortune they've both been enjoying. He, of course, rejects the idea that her desecrated spider has been responsible for him landing a top job at the university, an appointment that has earned him the contempt of the older staff. He burns all of her totems, accidentally throwing his own image on the fire.

Immediately after this Norman is almost hit by a truck and accused of violating one of his students but he still doesn't experience any alarm bells. Tansy warns him that others are using similar magic to do them harm but he's having none of it. A tape is mailed to him that contains a strange sound masked by one of his lectures. On playing it a mysterious force tries to scratch its way through their front door. Tansy turns off the tape but the telephone rings and the same sound emerges from the handset. Norman opens the door but Tansy pulls the plug in time.

Director Sidney Hayers (*Circus Of Horrors*) builds the suspense in a lean way as Norman pursues his wife to their seaside retreat as she attempts to take her own life so that he can survive the onslaught of evil power. The beach cottage is empty but he finds a book on satanic practices. Fearing her imminent suicide she stumbles upon a clue in the book and races to the local crypt. Against all his principles he performs a rite on one of the tombs using a photograph of his wife. Tansy returns from her walk into the sea in a trance. He takes her to a doctor who advises hospitalisation. Tansy demands to be taken home. There he finds out more assaults on his life and his faith in science. A sleepwalking Tansy attacks him with a kitchen knife before giving him a clue to who the real puppet master is.

In the UK, the movie was titled *Night Of The Eagle* and the eponymous creature makes its appearance at the end of the story. The 'eagle-eyed' among you will spot the line connected to its claw as it swoops down on Norman. However, it's a satisfactory climax and there's an ironic extra.

Even though, by 1962, Hammer had already started releasing their gothic remakes and soaking the screen with Technicolor gore, *Burn Witch Burn* is no hardcore claret fest. The clipped accents of the characters are also an endearing aspect of the time it was made. But it does have solid performances, a great score by William Alwyn and that vital ingredient for every classic horror movie—an eerie atmosphere that pervades every scene.

But does this quintessentially British movie translate, and are there any significant differences between the UK and US releases? Having watched both versions I can tell you that the integrity of the cut isn't compromised, but there are some

additions that bolster the US version. The main device is an opening voiceover by legendary TV and movie voiceover artist Paul Frees. Frees is no stranger to horror having provided his talents for *Thing From Another World*, *Tower of London* and another AIP classic *The Abominable Doctor Phibes*. Under a black screen Frees warns of the evil spell that is used within the movie and, through an ancient chant, dispels any ill effects that may be wrought on the hapless viewers. It's pure hokum but sets the tone nicely. With the audience's souls cleansed the movie begins.

The Anglo-Americanized logo is replaced by that of American International Pictures and obviously James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff's get top billing before the British credits. These have been reshot over the still of an open eye. This isn't as arresting as the UK titles where the eye is live action but doesn't blink for the duration. US eye is a painting and appears to have sleep glue on it. The US title *Burn, Witch, Burn* (uttered by Margaret Johnson at the end of the movie) replaces *Night Of The Eagle*.

The other American addition is at the conclusion of the movie when the camera tilts to the ground and finds the evil tape dropped there. The caption DO YOU BELIEVE? is flashed up to emphasize the words that Norman wrote on the blackboard in the opening scene. However, this has been subtly dealt with in the final scenes of the movie and seems heavy-handed and entirely unnecessary. It's now just an example of how movies were marketed during this era. But are movies that address the audience so far removed from the interactive experiences distributors want us to have today?

The US trailer on the MGM release is a perfect example of AIP's approach. It's fun, but I'll advise against watching it until after the movie, as it gives away much of the finale.

With crisp monochrome cinematography by Reginald Wyer, *Burn Witch Burn* was shot at Elstree Studios and in St Just, Cornwall. It gives the impression of a bygone era in Britain, when witchcraft, devil worship and naked virgin sacrifice was a middle class pursuit that went on behind the front doors of quiet villages as much as bridge evenings (featured in the movie) and polite cocktail parties.

Satan isn't as explicit a participant in this movie than the outings of the seventies. He's very much a background figure but that seems much more unsettling. In the 21st century we're living in times more enlightened about Satan and witchcraft aren't we. But living in one of those quiet English villages myself—just outside Stonehenge—I can attest that it's not something that now only happens in the yellow novels of Dennis Wheatley.

We have a secluded wood behind Wilton called Grovely that has a Roman road running through it. A paranormal society regularly convenes there because of tales regarding the witches that were buried under the gnarled trees that grow along its length. Under one you can always find spent candles, a pentagram and offerings of money. Strange, nobody ever takes the money...

Richard Jay Parker

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PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE

Directed by Dustin Mills
(2010) MVD Video DVD



As that old, worn-out cliché goes, "Dying is easy, comedy is hard." But isn't necessarily true. Granted, dying is pretty easy—but comedy can be even easier—especially if you actively avoid things like intelligence, having a unique point of view, or crafting an actual joke. Like most intensely unfunny people, Dustin Mills utilized this comedic shortcut when he wrote and directed *Puppet Monster Massacre*. Mills realized that you shouldn't struggle to come up with something genuinely original. You should just gloat on a childhood institution like the Muppets and lazily subvert it with a misomic cacophony of swear words, puppet rudity and cheap gore. Oh, and for that added dash of smug irony, you could set the film in the 1980s because that decade was just so completely hilarious. If anything, all remnants of the 80s should be buried alongside those unsold E.T. Alan carriages in the New Mexico desert. (See, I can be hilarious too.)

Serving as a prelude to the unbearable quaintness that's waiting just ahead, *Puppet Monster Massacre* opens with a hunter who is attacked and knocked unconscious by a penguin in the middle of the woods. When the hunter gains consciousness, he finds himself in the laboratory of Dr. Wolfgang Wagner and, thanks to some genetic meddling on behalf of Wolfgang, he quickly gives birth to a Giger-on-a-budget parasite. From there it's revealed that Wolfgang has invited four local teens, each with a single defining personality trait (e.g. the hero, the hero's girlfriend, an obnoxious punk guy and a nerd), to spend a night in his mansion. If any of them survive, they'll win a million dollars. But all is predictably not what it seems. You see, the teens share a link to Wolfgang's shady past... Should I continue? Because, if you can't see where this predictable storyline is heading then you've clearly never seen a movie before in your life. And if you haven't seen a movie before, *Puppet Monster Massacre* should not be where you start. Try *Built In* instead.

Calling *Puppet Monster Massacre* gimmicky isn't all that revelatory because I'm sure even the filmmakers are aware their movie is just a calculated gimmick. But this isn't why *Puppet Monster Massacre* is such a failure. The film fails because it doesn't build anything substantial on top of that gimmick. It is just another cliché riddled haunted house movie—but instead of being populated by a cast of talent less nobodies, *Puppet Monster Massacre* is filled with depressing, off-brand Muppets that are voiced by talent less nobodies who all seem to be standing way too close to the mike.

Puppet Monster Massacre isn't just predictable—it's also grimly unfunny. Jokes misfire and then drag on endlessly (such as a running joke in which a character is constantly frightened by common everyday objects), shouted swears are repeatedly used as a stand-in for actual comedy, fart gags are ever-present and like every horror film produced within the last 15 years, *Puppet Monster Massacre* falls back on lazy in-jokes and film references. Even worse, those film references are so glaringly obvious you wonder why they even bother.

Futile and obnoxious, *Puppet Monster Massacre* is a headache-inducing waste of time. Yet in spite of the film's grating pointlessness, Mills plasters his name all over the movie. Say what you want about Andy Milligan, but at least his guy had enough self-awareness and humility to utilize pseudonyms for some of his many on screen credits. Mills, you really have nothing to be proud of here. Please put your camera back in the trash where it belongs.

Mike Sullivan

TROLLHUNTER Directed by André Ørved Magnet Entertainment Blu-ray / DVD



Though they're hardly prevalent enough to constitute a "wave," a number of Scandinavian genre films have gained international attention in recent years. Let the *Right One In*, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, *Dead Snow* (Dead Snow), *Rare Exports*, and now... *Trollhunter*. These don't all come from the same country and run the gamut from official Academy to irreducibly-potted indie films, but they do shed light on a region of the cinematic world heretofore known chiefly for Ingmar Bergman and Lars von Trier.

Trollhunter isn't a radical departure from hundreds of other fantasy films made over the past few decades. The hackneyed "mockumentary" or "found footage" gimmick is trotted out once more, and the menace happens to be "trolls" but could have been—had the setting not been Norway—the Loch Ness monster, the chupacabra, Bigfoot, giant killer butterflies, whatever.

But *Trollhunter* works, and not just because it's a "foreign film"—with the snootish cachet that designation has with some audiences—either (although the amazing Norwegian scenery doesn't hurt, nor does the Scandinavian sense of humor). It's simply a well made movie, with decent spatial effects, some humor, generally likeable characters (though not a lot of time is spent on back story or character development), an interesting script and satisfactory production values. The ending isn't quite perfect, but it's not a cheat or major let-down, either.

Three Norwegian film students—on-camera "talent" Thomas, sound recordist Johanna, and cameraman Kalle—set out to make a documentary about the mysterious Hans, who has been seen in the vicinity of some suspicious "bear attacks." Eventually, they discover Hans is the government's official "troll hunter." Trolls are not magical, fairy tale monsters, but real, long-lived humanoid (though quite large) creatures who have recently been straying out of their assigned "territory" for unknown reasons. Hans and the students try to solve the mystery of the wayward trolls, while the government—in the person of annoying and officious bureaucrat Finn—attempts to keep the existence of the creatures a secret.

Hans is played by well-known Norwegian television personality Otto Jespersen. Although Norwegian viewers familiar with his previous, often politically-oriented humor may have had to exercise their willing suspension of disbelief to accept Jespersen as the gruff but dedicated troll hunter, in truth he plays his part 100% straight and is very convincing—in fact, he's almost the only person in the film who seems to have a "past" and is the only one who gets any introspective dialogue. The performers playing Finn, Thomas, Johanna, and the others are all fine, but since *Trollhunter* is, ostensibly, footage of a documentary about Hans, it is only logical he is the most developed character.

While exposure to a different culture is one of the pleasures of watching international cinema, certain socio-cultural references are inevitably lost on non-domestic audiences. A bit of research helps, but even if one knows nothing of Norwegian folklore (or Norway itself, for that matter) and therefore misses some jokes or allusions, *Trollhunter* is still good enough to appeal to all audiences.

Regardless of one's cultural ignorance of troll lore—Hans says fairy tales aren't exactly accurate in their description of the trolls—non-Norwegian viewers can pick up a few things as the film goes along. Trolls have a good sense of smell, so the hunter and his aides smear "troll stink" all over themselves to avoid detection. Trolls can sense Christians and are hostile to them. Trolls will eat almost anything, like to chew on old cars, can be lured into traps by using concrete and charcoal as bait, and so on. They also explode or turn to stone in the sunlight (or when Hans wields his artificial-sunlight, troll-killing weapon), seemingly-magical reactions which are explained away scientifically later in the film.

Trollhunter doesn't overexplore its trolls too much. There are only three major "troll scenes" in the film, and while they're clearly CGI creations, the quality of the effects is quite good. The trolls themselves—who come in two primary modes, mountain trolls and forest trolls—aren't too ferocious-looking, with their wrinkled, old-man faces (and some big, honking noses) on shaggy, Teletubby-like bodies, but their sheer size and power make them rather fearsome, indeed.

However, *Trollhunter* doesn't demonize the trolls: they're not quite human but they're more than simple animals or monsters, and the film works up a fair amount of sympathy for them. The film draws parallels between the trolls—who've left their "reservation" and must be hunted down as they approach "civilization" (Hans even describes an earlier time when he was ordered to massacre a whole tribe of trolls, down to the females and babies, because their presence impeded a government-supported construction project in troll territory)—and various beleaguered indigenous groups of the past, including Native Americans and aboriginal Australians.

This allusion to official genocide and the depiction of the relentless government cover-up give *Trollhunter* a hard edge beneath its excitement and suspense. There's humor, to be sure—Finn making false bear tracks which fool no one, a hilarious if wholly incongruous scene featuring some entrapping Poles who deliver the carcass of a Croatian bear to be used as part of Finn's misinformation plan, even the basic concept of giant, woolly trolls to begin with—but this isn't a parody or a cynically comic riff on the monster genre, it's a righteous horror movie.

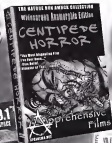
Trollhunter could easily have been made in another country with another central menace, yet retained all of the characters and plot—and such a film might have been entertaining, or it might have been just one more routine, faux-documentary monster movie. Luckily, *Trollhunter* was made in exactly the right place, at the right time, by the right filmmakers, and it's well worth a viewing... or two. Blu-ray and DVD extras include: deleted scenes; improve and bloopers; extended scenes; HD Nat. A look at *Trollhunter*; behind the scenes, and a photo gallery.

David Wills

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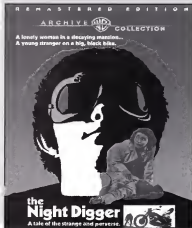
(1971) Warner Archives DVD

When elderly Edith Prince (Pamela Brown) advertises for a handyman, her unmarried, middle-aged, live-in daughter/caretaker Maure (Patricia Neal) of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* certainly isn't expecting the likes of Billy Jarvis (Nicholas Clay, the Lancet-to-be of John Boorman's *Excalibur* who had previously appeared in Hammer's *These Are the Damned*) to show up on her doorstep: the young, brash biker rubs her the wrong way from the very beginning and she takes immediate steps to discourage him. But to Maure's frustration, Mother is delighted with the aggressive young charmer—and even goes so far as to insist that he move into Maure's room! Since we are dealing with a thriller, of course it won't be long before there's good reason to suspect that Billy is toting some dark secrets (though nothing as overtly sinister as the halibut featured in all versions of the classic *Night Must Fall*, to which this film pays obvious tribute without blatantly ripping it off). Indeed, as the audience is explicitly shown, Billy is a serial rapist/murderer with a near-foolproof means of disposing of the bodies. But the way in which the dawning truth will affect Maure and her mother may yet hold some surprises...

Screenwriter Rosalind Dahl (who adapted Joy Cowley's novel as a vehicle for his then-wife Patricia Neal) certainly wasn't known for his subtlety when it came to his famous children's books, and *The Night Digger* (known as *The Road Builder* in its native England) does, indeed, contain a sequence so graphically disturbing that it earned an "R" rating in America (the TV version was significantly cut). But for all that, this is not a gory stalk-and-slash item but an intense psychological drama and dark romance. This was also an extremely rare theatrical outing for highly-experienced television director Alastair Reid, who gets fine results from his entire cast (including the beloved Graham Crowden—almost certainly best known to readers of this publication as the florid "Solideo" in the Doctor Who serial *The Homs of Nimron*)—seen here as a chatty neighbor who delights in relaying the gory details of the crimes reported in the paper, and who never sacrifices tension in favor of shock tactics. Indeed, his (mostly) restrained approach leads to the film's only significant problem (and not everyone will agree with even this): the denouement is understated to the point that it renders the finale somewhat abrupt and unsatisfying—this is one case where a climactic shock would have been both memorable and appropriate. Nevertheless, those who've never had the pleasure should see this film at least once.

The Warner disc-on-demand offers a most attractive widescreen transfer of the film along with its typically-overcooked American trailer.

Slane M. Dallmann



THE WITCHMAKER

Directed by William O. Brown

(1969) Code Red DVD

The first of several collaborations between actor/producer L.Q. Jones and Green Acres regular Ahy Moore, *The Witchmaker* features Moore leading a team of paranormal investigators (along with skeptical reporter Anthony Eisley), who head out to a secluded shack in the swamp so that sultry sensitive Thordis Brandt can get in touch with the spirits. Too bad for Brandt—the spirits want to get in touch with her too, by way of Luther the Berserk (John Lodge), a warlock who's been carving up local girls and draining their blood.

Luther calls on war-faced witch Jesse (the delightful Helene Winston) for help, and in return transforms her into sexy Warrenne Ott. The two of them call together Luther's coven and lay siege to the researchers in the swamp, using their influence over Brandt to lure the others to their doom.

Helmed by industrial film veteran William Brown (whose only other feature credit is the obscure *One Way Wahini*, also featuring Moore and Eisley), *The Witchmaker* is a lively little indie horror flick that's heavy on atmosphere (exterior were filmed on location in Marksville, Louisiana) and peppered

with some effective shock sequences. Although it has (unjustly) fallen into obscurity, it's a transitional film of sorts that bridges the sensibilities that dominated horror films in the sixties with the more "realistic" horrors that reigned after *Rosemary's Baby* and *Night of the Living Dead*.

Moore and Eisley have good chemistry, and their initially rational and low-key response to the building supernatural threat really grounds the film and helps build tension. The most surprising performance comes from bit player Lodge as Luther the Berserk. Although the role was originally meant for John Davis Chandler, Lodge delivers a robust, over-the-top performance that avoids being too campy, while conveying a fair amount of physical menace. (Sharp-eyed viewers should also watch for perpetually elderly character actor Burt Mustin as the boatman.)

Although Jones has said he researched witchcraft and the occult before making this film, don't look here for an accurate portrayal of the black arts. Like most witch movies from the period, the film tosses together a mixture of Arthur Miller/Shakespeare-style sorcery, devil worship, and even some ancient Egyptian imagery (Luther draws an Ankh on his victim's stomachs before slaughtering them). And then there's Luther's gaggle of witches, all decked out in themed period costumes (belly dancer, Puritan, witch, etc.) that make them look less like a coven and more like fugitives from a Renaissance Fair for Batman villains. They don't do much but drink and engage in implied orgies, but they are fun to look at. The group includes Sue Bernard (daughter of photographer Bruno Bernard) from *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, Patricia Wymer (*The Babysitter*), and L.A. horror host Larry Vincent (a.k.a. Seymour).

The Witchmaker was last seen on VHS via a sell-through release from Intercontinental Home Video in the 1980s. Since then, it popped up on DVD from Midnight Video and Snister Cinema. Code Red presents the film in a new 2.35:1 transfer, with an endorsement from producer L.Q. Jones. The print (which bears the film's alternate release title, *The Legend of Witch Hollow*) shows some scratches and debris, and goes a little green here and there, but is otherwise sharp and colorful.

Although it lacks a trailer and the packaging doesn't take advantage of the film's excellent poster art ("Is this sex after death?"), the disc does have some worthy extras. Jones is on hand for a 20-minute on-camera interview, during which he discusses his research in occult phenomenon in advance of making this movie, along with memories of Sam Peckinpah. There's also a commentary track featuring Jones, Director of Photography John Morrill, and Code Red chief Bill Olsen that covers the film's origins, the shooting locations (soundstage work was done at the old Monogram Studios), working with Technicolor, and even more memories of Sam Peckinpah.

Jones and Moore followed this film with *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), and the excellent *A Boy and His Dog* (1975). While *The Witchmaker* doesn't quite match the quality of those later films, it is a well-crafted horror production that makes good use of its limited budget. The new transfer looks great, and genre fans (even those who may have seen some of the previous releases of the film) should definitely check it out.

Brian Allright



THE WILD, WILD PLANET

Directed by Antonio Margheriti
(as Anthony Dawson)

(1965) Warner Archives DVD

When you look at the fully-functional miniature cityscapes and candy-colored spacecraft of Italian science fiction from the 60s through the 80s, do you automatically laugh at the "hokey" special effects? Or can you embrace them as part of the defining look and feel of a genre category all its own—much as an authentic Japanese *kaiju* thriller simply must feature miniature sets and suit actors?

Acknowledging that Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* was simply in a class by itself, it was Antonio Margheriti (known to international viewers as "Anthony Dawson") before he added the middle initial "M" to distinguish himself from a recognizable British actor who established this template in such films as *Assignment Outer Space* and *Battle of the Worlds* before moving on to the well-received "Gamma 1" film quartet, which commenced with this psychedelic free-for-all, "Galaxy Criminals" was opportunistic re-titled by MGM to echo the then-popular TV series *The Wild, Wild West*—and quite frankly, had James West and Artemus Gordon traveled by rocket ship rather than train, they might very well have had adventures similar to this!

Though much of *The Wild, Wild Planet* takes place on a futuristic Earth, our heroes represent space station Gamma 1. Leading the way is Tony Russell as Commander Mike Halstead, armed and abetted by the gorgeous (and hot-tempered) Lieutenant Connie Gomez (Lisa Gastoni), and yes, that's *Enter the Ninja's* Franco Nero serving the team as Lieutenant Jake. The stage is set for some rogue detective work when several of Earth's notable scientists start disappearing: as it turns out, they're being abducted by endlessly-replaceable clones capable of reducing their still-living victims to Barbie-doll size before whisking them off in normal-looking briefcases! But when one such abduction goes wrong (permanently dwarfing an esteemed professor), the trail of clues eventually leads to Nurni (Massimo Serato)—a mad scientist intent, of course, on creating a new race of genetically perfect beings. Naturally, Nurni envisions himself leading the way, but in order to achieve his own perfection, he'll need the help of Connie. . .

Oh, there are plenty of outdated elements with which to whoop it up: most notably the "futuristic" cabaret sequences with the butterfly dancers. Male chauvinism runs rampant (Halstead knows just how to cool a fiery dame), and of course there's the infamous line delivered when the crew is attacked by a bevy of scantily-clad female clones: "Watch out for those gadgets on their chests!" But these elements alone can't account for this film's unique and remarkable atmosphere of violence and perversion. Along the way, a little girl is murdered on camera (nothing graphic, but it definitely happens), the Gamma crew enthusiastically battles a group of (male) clones with miniature flamethrowers (!), and then there's Nurni's ultimate goal (it's no spoiler—it was heavily emphasized on the poster and in the trailer) of fusing his own body with that of Connie now that his technique has been perfected—he also keeps his failed, deformed experiments alive in a chamber which he dubs "hell" as a reminder of how important it is for his master race to achieve "heaven." And the overall effect is emphasized throughout with the snazzy cars and the loving miniatures referred to above, leading up to a most satisfying mini-cataclysm involving a crimson deluge. As I've suggested elsewhere, producer Dino de Laurentis and production designer Donato Donati knew exactly what they were doing when they eschewed the more realistic look of *Star Wars*, et al for an atmosphere closer to Margheriti's in their 1980 *Flash Gordon* (which may qualify as the best film Margheriti never actually made, at that).

While the subsequent "Gamma 1" entries all had their moments, they never quite measured up to the opener. Russell, Gastoni and Franco reprised their roles in the immediate sequel *The War of the Planets* (1966), taking on the Diaphanoids (aliens consisting of glowing lights) in an enjoyable entry before "Jack Stewart" (Giacomo Rossi-Stuart) took over as Commander Rod Jackson for the film we used to know as *Planet on the Prowl* (this 1966 entry was restored to its much-too-similar original title *War Between the Planets* for the Dark Sky DVD release, where it was paired with the unrelated *Creation of the Humanoids*) and 1967's earthbound *The Snow Devils* (which, if nothing else, featured the best music to be heard in the series). MGM would go on to represent 1968's *The Green Slime* as a fifth Gamma film.

The Wild, Wild Planet was never released on VHS in America, but the letterboxed MGM laserdisc was quite the enjoyable acquisition in its day. Their on-demand DVD was never re-mastered and unfortunately retains a moderately worn look, but the all-important colors are vivid and the presentation remains quite acceptable. The theatrical trailer has not been included, but it can easily be found on YouTube. If you have yet to see this film, here's your best chance yet.



Shane M. Dallowman

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THE DEVIL WITHIN HER
Aka I DON'T WANT TO BE BORN,
SHARON'S BABY

Directed by Peter Sarsdy
(1975) Scorpion Releasing DVD

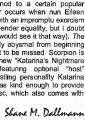
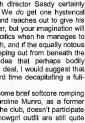
If more people had actually seen this film, perhaps the widely-circulated "Worst Of" movie lists wouldn't automatically jump-start with better-known films ranging from Plan 9 from Outer Space to Battlefield Earth. The film released in England as *I Don't Want to Be Born*—a reference

to the Devil Within Her (the British title of the film we know best as *Beyond the Door*) was at one point imaginatively retitled *Sharon's Baby* (even though the baby's mother in the film is named Lucif). Under any moniker, it's a prime candidate for the worst film ever made by a talented director—Peter Sarsdy was responsible for three of the stronger latter-day Hammer Horrors (*Taste the Blood of Dracula*, *Countess Dracula*, *Hounds of the Ripper*) but somehow landed here en route to the infamous Pin Zadora Hollywood trash melodrama *The Lonely Lady*—working with a potentially terrific cast. Now follow this, if you will...

Luci (Joan Collins) used to be an exotic dancer at a nightclub owned by the city John Steiner (Mario Bava's Shock, aka *Beyond the Door* II), with whom she was also carrying on an affair at the time. She was also simultaneously sharing what she thought was harmless affection with another club performer—a dwarf by the name of Hercules (George Clooney). Now, Luci has given up this life in favor of a happy marriage to Gino Carlesi (the criminally-underappreciated Ralph Bates: was he playing an Italian for any particular reason?) and the couple is about to welcome a newborn son. Unfortunately for everybody involved, the jealous Hercules just happens to have Satanic powers and has cast a prenatal curse on the infant, who, after an exceptionally difficult delivery (at the hands of Donald Pleasence) immediately takes to leeching people's faces and brutally punching them in the nose. It gets worse.

Yes, we are actually asked to believe that the newborn (a perfectly ordinary-looking tyke—we're not dealing with Larry Cohen or Peter Jackson here) is carrying out the ensuing murder spree (what's the matter—was the title *Kill, Baby, Kill* taken?), even though director Sarsdy certainly can't afford to show it in detail. We do get one hysterical POV shot in which the baby's hand reaches out to give his nanny a gentle nudge into the river, but your imagination will have to provide the hilarious specifics when he manages to hang someone from a tree (Oh, and if the equally notorious shots of the face of Hercules peeping out from beneath the baby blankets give you the idea that perhaps bodily transfiguration was part of the deal, I would suggest that even Hercules would have a hard time decapitating a full-sized man with a spiced...)

The picture is upheaved with some brief softcore romping and topless cabaret dancing (Caroline Munro, as a former colleague of Luci still working at the club, doesn't participate in the latter, but she and her showgirl outfit are still quite appealing), and the inevitable nod to a certain popular demonology-orientated blockbuster occurs when nun Ellen Atkins attempts to save the day with an impromptu exorcism (well, that's a nice nod towards gender equality, but I doubt that the Roman Catholic Church would see it that way). The Devil Within Her is jaw-droppingly abysmal from beginning to end... and, of course, is not to be missed. Scorpion is releasing the film as part of its new "Katanna's Nightmare Theatre" out-classic lineup, featuring optional "host" frameworks by professional wrestling personality Katarina Leigh Waters. Co-star Steiner was kind enough to provide an exclusive interview for the disc, which also comes with the theatrical trailer.



Shane M. Daltmann

POOR PRETTY EDDIE
Directed by Richard Robinson
(1975) Cultra Blu-ray / DVD combo

It's rare to be able to say you've encountered a truly unique film, especially now that nearly anything and everything is available for viewing at the click of a mouse. But I have to be clear: there is no other movie quite like *Poor Pretty Eddie*. If you have not seen it, you should watch it at least once, and you should prepare to be left stupefied.

This nearly undeclassifiable film was marketed under various titles (*Heartbreak Motel*, *Black Vengeance*, *Redneck County Rape*) as a horror film, a rape/revenge story, a exploitation pic, and a Deliverance knock-off. It is all of these things, but also something else entirely. At the risk of sounding pretentious, it is really an arthouse exploitation film, a genre-bending category where the likes of *Jamaa Fanaka*, *Jean Rollin*, and *Abel Ferrara* occasionally toiled. The film exists in a magical cinematic netherworld where "artsy" and "tartsy" collide, embrace, then turn and ask if you'd like to suck on a tomato.

After her car breaks down, singer Leslie Uggams finds herself stranded at a backwoods lodge run by alcoholic ex-dancer Bertha (Shelley Winters), her towering scar-faced handyman (Ted Cassidy), and would-be lothario/country singer-boy Ted Eddie (Michael Christian). Although Winters wants the prickly, condescending singer out of her hair as soon as possible, Christian becomes increasingly obsessed with keeping her there permanently. After being raped by Christian, Uggams fruitlessly seeks help from the haysed sheriff (Slim Pickens) and repulsive justice of the peace Dub Taylor (his "Yankies are like hemorrhoids" speech is a highlight) before being forced into a literal shotgun wedding at the film's bloody, downbeat climax.

Playing out like a slow-motion nightmare, *Poor Pretty Eddie* is infused with an almost overwhelming sense of atrophy, everyone and everything in this isolated hillbilly hell has gone to seed. The actors are in excellent form (if occasionally over the top), particularly Cassidy (better known as Lurch from *The Addams Family*) and Uggams.

The quality of filmmaking on display here is surprising, given that director Richard Robinson was by all accounts a fairly unambitious pornographer. If *Poor Pretty Eddie* has merit as a film rather than a grindhouse curiosity (and trust me, it does), then we can probably thank cinematographer David Worth (on hand for an informative commentary track) and editor Frank Mazzola. Worth's imagery and Mazzola's intriguing editorial choices, combined with the delicious "found" scenery at Charlie Williams Pinecrest Lodge, make the film look as bent as its characters.

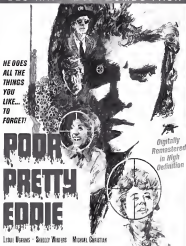
That's not to say that *Poor Pretty Eddie* goes easy on the shock; there are plenty of sequences that will leave viewers with their mouths hanging open, if not turning in away in disgust. The rape scene is intercut with slow-motion footage of dogs mating—dogs that Christian will later gleefully butcher and serve for dinner. Pickens and Taylor are especially unctuous, asking Uggams to expose her breasts while ignoring her pleas for help. And Shelley Winters shakes her by-the-empire money-maker several times.

Shot near Athens, Ga., and financed by pornographer/gangster/convicted killer Michael Thevis (now in his 70s, still in Federal Prison in North Carolina), the story behind *Poor Pretty Eddie* is just as deranged as the one in the script. Thankfully, Temple of Schock's Chris Poggini provides a lengthy essay that details the film's bizarre production history. The disc also includes a trailer, a handful of production stills, a restoration demo, the aforementioned commentary with Worth (moderated by Joe Rubin), and a postcard featuring the original poster art.

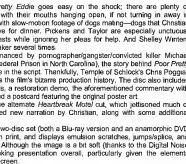
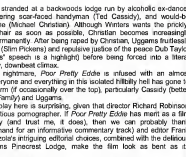
Not included, unfortunately, is the alternate *Heartbreak Motel* cut, which jettisoned much of the controversial material and added new narration by Christian, along with some additional footage and a sort-of happy ending.

The 1.78:1 transfer used on the two-disc set (both a Blu-ray version and an anamorphic DVD are included) was taken from a film print, and displays emulsion scratches, jumps/cuts, and some uneven color here and there. Although the image is a bit soft (thanks to the Digital Noise Reduction process), it's a nice-looking presentation overall, particularly given the elements available—and the ugliness on the screen.

BLU-RAY + DVD COMBO PACK



LESLIE UGGAMS • SHELLEY WINTERS • MICHAEL CHRISTIAN



Bryan L. Yeatter

SKIDOO

Directed by Otto Preminger
(1968) Olive Films DVD

Until recent years, this legendary Paramount Pictures disaster was quite a difficult film to see—one had to content oneself by reading brief descriptions of a "hard" LSD comedy in which Groucho Marx played God (and smoked pot). Was it any wonder that for the longest time I imagined a "trip" scene set in Heaven with Groucho as the Devil? Such was far from the case...

The family-lease of mercurial director Otto Preminger (in *Harm's Way*, *Exodus*) kept *Skidoo* off the home video market for decades, insisting that the film didn't represent Preminger as they thought he should be remembered. But fan curiosity forced him to demand when Turner Classic Movies ran the film in a late-night "cult" slot—fully uncensored but brutally short of its widescreen majesty. Finally, fans and curiosity-seekers alike got their wish—not via Paramount but through Olive Films, which has finally released *Skidoo* to DVD in all its notorious glory.

Skidoo doesn't immediately present itself as a "drug" film at all—it's a surprisingly conventional mob comedy in which retired hitman Tony Banks (Jackie Gleason) resists being called back into action as the one man who might successfully "kiss" (kill) his long-time friend George "Blue Chips" Peckard (Mickey Rooney), now enjoying protective custody in Alcatraz as he prepares to turn informant and testify against his former boss "God" (Groucho, in his last role, controls the action from the safety of his private yacht—his role is limited and he's made up to resemble his young self as opposed to his naturally aging television persona, but dammit, he's still GROUCHO and that's good enough for me). Banks has plenty of reasons to not want to leave his comfortable home—not the least of which is the fact that his daughter Darlene (Alexandra Hay) has threatened his conservative sensibilities by taking up with a hippie known as Stash (John Philip Law) and his commune. But the lethal tactics of his employers leave him no choice—Tony is off to Alcatraz while his obnoxious wife Flo (Carol Channing) embraces Darlene's new friends, going so far as to invite them to live with her when the city officials attempt to force them out. Eventually, of course, Flo and Darlene start looking into Tony's abrupt disappearance—and the plot truly thickens when Tony makes inadvertent use of the "special" stationery kept by his reluctant cellmate—a draft dodger known as Fred the Professor (Austin Pendleton). Can friends and enemies alike overcome the generation gap and find mutual fulfillment with a little chemical enhancement?

For a film with such a horrendous reputation, *Skidoo* is anything but unwatchable—its only crime (if you can call it that) is a charming naiveté. If Preminger intended to appeal simultaneously to the adult audience and the youth trade, the film's 1968 "R" rating immediately compromised him. (The film barely scratches the PG-13 surface by today's standards: sure, there's plenty of implied nudity as the hippies indulge in body painting, but the most scandalous sequence involves Channing strutting her stuff in see-through lingerie as she attempts to force eager young mob wannabe Frankie Avalon into a compromising position.) As a provocative look at The Establishment meeting the counterculture, the film fails because the "mob" material doesn't offer the ideal contrast with the "hippie" elements—after all, organized crime can scarcely be said to represent The Establishment even if its members do enjoy luxurious, materialistic lifestyles—the cops would be equally happy to get their hands on almost any of these characters. Besides, this particular cinematic nirvana had already been reached the previous year in the form of Theodore J. Flicker's brilliant James Coburn vehicle *The President's Analyst* (also a Paramount release)—one

can't improve on perfection. Nor are the hippies even as "countercultural" as their true-life models—we're asked to believe that they carry nothing but Chinese herbs and smoke nothing but... pumpkin. That's right. For all you may have heard to the contrary, God does NOT wind up smoking pot in *Skidoo*... it was pumpkin oil along. On the other hand, Gleason's Tony Banks does, indeed, take an unintended LSD trip, and it's here that we're treated to the requisite "psychedelic" sequence in which Preminger pulls out all of his filmic stops (yes, even the DVD menu kicks off with the image of Groucho's head atop a floating screen) to simulate Tony's journey to ultimate truth—a trip which resembles the real thing not at all, according to experienced smokers (I'll have to take their word for it).

So why watch? Not out of "bad film" fascination, as I see it. *Skidoo* may not have achieved its intended goals, but it entertains quite nicely throughout, and you're never going to see a cast like this again: it would seem that everybody who did not appear in it's a *Mad*, *Mad*, *Mad*, *Mad* *World* would up here instead. In addition to the names already cited, *Skidoo* features turns by Arnold Stang, Peter Lawford, Slim Pickens, George Raft, Michael Constantine and a young actor by the name of Richard Kiel. And in a *Batman* inflects, Preminger (who, of course, was a *Bat*-villain himself, being one of three different actors to portray Mr. Freeze on the television phenomenon) also includes appearances by Cesar Romero, Frank Gorshin and Burgess Meredith! Take that and flavor it with the inimitable Harry Nilsson (just on the verge of debuting "Everybody's Talkin'" in the Oscar-winning *Midnight Cowboy*), who comes as a prison tower guard (along with Fred Clark) during the delightful "Garbage Can Ballet" hallucination. Then just let it happen—by the time the characters converge on God's yacht for the grand finale, you just might want to sing the theme song along with Channing (but don't ask me where she got that outfit). And yes, this is the film in which the entire and title sequence is sung by Nilsson himself!

Skidoo may not be a "great" film, but there's simply no substitute for it—anyone reading this publication certainly ought to indulge it with at least one viewing. And while the Olive Films DVD is devoid of the sort of extras one would certainly hope for, it does offer the definitive video presentation.

Shane M. Dallenmann



DAMNATION ALLEY

Directed by Jack Smight (1977) Shout! Factory Blu-ray / DVD

Post-apocalyptic being all the rage in the 1970s, an adaptation of Roger Zelazny's popular novel sounded ideal on paper. Unfortunately, *Damnation Alley* arrived on screens in a compromised vision of the original, still, Jack Smight's rough-and-tumble version nonetheless is a cigar-chomping, Braun-heavy rollicking good time, thanks in part to screenwriter Alan Sharp in Mr. fix-it mode (as he mentions in his all-too-brief interview on the film's Blu-ray, his main

strength is as a dialogue writer—and there are a number of notable lines to be remembered here). Jan-Michael Vincent and George Peppard are the younger man/older mentor team, filled out by a supporting cast including Dominique Sands, Paul Winfield and Jackie Earle Haley. *Damnation Alley* behaves as a cacophonous roar, depicting a world terrorized by World War III and heavy doses of radiation, insects, and uncontrollable storms. Our heroes bandy about the desert landscape in seeking the passageway of the title, picking up some stranded individuals on their way. Previously relegated to a 1985 Key Video release, *Damnation Alley* has thankfully been resurrected in a crystal clear widescreen transfer on both Blu-ray and DVD formats. Extras include interviews with Sharp, an examination of the Landmaster vehicles and commentary by producer Paul Maslansky. Smight and Peppard have since passed away, and Jan-Michael Vincent is (as usual) MIA.

Arnon Graham



With your host Vince Rotolo

QUICK FLICKS

Brief reviews and news

THE SILENT TREATMENT

Kino International's announcement of the complete *Metropolis* was big news last year for film aficionados around the world. Fans of Fritz Lang's sci-fi masterpiece had mixed feelings about the 1924 release of the picture, which featured a score by composer Giorgio Moroder, as well as new songs by Freddie Mercury, Pat Benatar, Loverboy, Adam Ant, Bonnie Tyler, Cyndi Lauper, Jon Anderson, and Billy Squair. Kino has secured the rights to the music and has issued the 80-minute version of *Metropolis* on Blu-ray and DVD. It's a great companion piece to the nearly complete (148 minutes) movie, and will be greeted with more enthusiasm by those who first caught *Metropolis* on the big screen twenty-seven years ago.

Metropolis isn't the only silent motion picture that is in the news. Lon Chaney's classic *The Phantom of the Opera* debuts on Blu-ray in a two-disc Ultimate Edition. Included in this set is an all new HD restoration of the film (with the Bal Masque sequence in two-strip Technicolor and other scenes hand tinted), with both the 1925 and 1929 versions featured. There is a brand new score by The Alloy Orchestra, in addition to Gaylord Carter's famous 1974 score (released for the very first time in stereo) and Gabriel Thibaudaux's 1990 score. Together with new audio commentary by Dr. Jon Mirsals, this edition contains the following extras: a still frame gallery, original trailers; an interview with Gabriel Thibaudaux; and, a reproduction of the 1925 souvenir program and script. Image Entertainment will issue the set in America, while European audiences can find the Ultimate Edition of *The Phantom of the Opera* on the Park Circus label. The tentative street date is November 21st.

A FITTING TRIBUTE TO WOODEE

Screen contributor Greg Goodsell reports, "The Big Box of Wood box set from S'More Entertainment collects no less than 13 features that the legendary Edward D. Wood Jr. either directed or wrote screenplays for: *The Violent Years* (1956), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), *The Sinister Urge* (1960), *Orgy of the Dead* (1965), *Hot Joe* (1978), *Trick Shooting with Kenne Duncan* (1983), *Crossroads Avenger* (1983), *Fugitive Girls* (1974), *Beech Bunnies* (1976), *Bride of the Monster* (1955), *Jail Bait* (1954), *Snow Bunnies* (1972), and *Drop Out Wife* (1972). The set is rich with extras, as indie film mogul David DeCoteau and *Look Back in Angora* documentarian Ted Newsom was eloquent on commentary tracks. Among the several extras is an extremely rare, extended 1994 video interview with Wood's wife, Kathy. Notoriously camera-shy, Kathy tells the viewer about how she first spied her future husband "passing the collection plate at a Hollywood Science of Mind lecture..." *Big Box of Wood* retails for \$49.99.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

On the import front, Eureka's *Masters of Cinema* series debuts 1971's *Silent Running* and the 1958 Orson Welles thriller *Touch of Evil* on Blu-ray. No word from Universal Pictures (they hold the rights to both films) if domestic editions will be popping up anytime soon. Australian company Umbrella Entertainment promises *Eraserhead* on Blu-ray in early 2012. David Lynch will be working with Umbrella Entertainment on a new HD transfer, and, yes, the Blu-ray will be region-free! British based Shameless Screen Entertainment cooks up two versions of Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* on Blu-ray. Film punks take heed: the disc consists of a new director's edit (approved by Deodato), as well as the British cut, which omits 14 seconds of scenes that contain animal cruelty. In the U.S., Grindhouse Releasing offers the complete unedited print of the film—but only on the DVD format. It's not all bad news though... there are plenty of extras to make delirious *Cannibal Holocaust* fans rejoice: new introductions to the film by Deodato; the never before seen documentary titled *The Long Road Back from Hell* (featuring Kim Newman, Deodato, and actress Francesca Giardi); *Film and Be Damned* features interviews with Carl G. Yorkie and the director; an Easter Egg, and, the film's trailer. The disc is region B locked (Europe only), so North American audiences without all-region Blu-ray players will be left out in the cold.

DOMESTIC BLISS aka NEW TO BLU (or DOUBLE-DIP HELL)

Independent company Twilight Time has licensed (for a limited time) two films from Sony Pictures—the original *Fright Night* (1985) and Julius Verne's *Mysterious Island* (1961), which features the stop-motion brilliance of Ray Harryhausen. Both titles are available for the first time on Blu-ray, and can be purchased directly from Screen Archives Entertainment (www.screenarchives.com). Better hurry though—only 3,000 copies of each title will be for sale. VCI Entertainment delivers *Dark Night of the Scarecrow* and K. Gordon Murray's *Santa Claus* on Blu-ray. Image Entertainment has Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Halloween II*, and *Black Christmas*. Cult Epics resuscitates the Spanish torture thriller in a *Glass Cage* on Blu-ray (picture quality is much improved over their DVD edition from 2004). Blue Underground's HD editions of *Lucio Fulci's Zombi* (two-disc set) and *House by the Cemetery* are to die for (pun intended). Universal's *Blu-ray for Halloween II* (1981) contains as an extra the compilation film *Terror in the Asiles* (1984), and Lionsgate delivers a 25th anniversary Blu-ray for *Evil Dead 2*.



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